ZILOI
Translated by amixy
!!?
University of the Underworld

University of the Underworld

by Ziloi

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01

The evening breeze in the winter always carried a chill, but the man standing outside the hotel did not acknowledge it at all. Behind him was parked an expensive car, which shielded him from much of the harsh wind.

He had long grown used to these bone-chilling gales.

The steadfast gaze and the ramrod-straight posture he had held for an hour was indicative of the man's excellent manners. The hotel staff also assumed that he was merely a chauffeur for some wealthy client, and therefore paid him no heed. However, it was the impatience in his eyes that betrayed him—the man was not as genteel and mild-mannered as he appeared.

It was another thirty minutes later when the door to the hotel finally opened, and a man dressed in a black suit stepped outside. The stony expression on his face eased somewhat upon seeing the man standing by the car, but his steps stilled stiffly when he detected the other man's annoyance.

"Apologies—I had a stomachache just as I was coming out. I went to take a dump first."

"Then you should've notified me instead of leaving me to wait here for over an hour, like a guard dog."

"Yes, of course. My phone just ran out of power."

"It was from you playing with it, wasn't it? Make sure you finish reading the finance report before leaving work tomorrow. I will not be highlighting the key points for you."

"Fine fine fine. Whatever the Great Qin says goes."

"Get in the car. Do you want to head home, or somewhere else?"

"Home, to sleep."

The suited man had not a word of complaint despite being ridden so hard by a chauffeur when he was actually the boss. On the contrary, he secretly let out a sigh of relief, as if he'd been spared. Just as he was about to get in the car, a smattering of footsteps sounded from behind them. Those were followed by a booming voice.

"Stop right there, Bai Shaonan!"

Qin Feng arched his brow as he glanced toward Bai Shaonan. He was just in time to see his boss roll his eyes at the car window before slowly turning around. "What a coincidence, Fu Ruofei."

The words themselves sounded cordial enough, but Bai Shaonan uttered them with the most contemptuous expression. He might as well have engraved the words "fuck off" right on his face.

The middle-aged man, Fu Ruofei, had already worked up a temper, and Bai Shaonan's attitude was no doubt gasoline on the fire. But he knew very well, no matter how angry he was, that this was not the place to make a scene. Reluctantly, he gritted his teeth and said, "Just now, I ran into Bai Qinghe upstairs. I thought we told you that you're not to have any contact with each other!"

Bai Shaonan scoffed and corrected him. "You people said 'no contact allowed in a business context.' But today is my father's birthday, and as a son, I had dinner with my father to celebrate. What's the problem? Qin Feng, send the contract to him first thing tomorrow. He must've forgotten what kind of agreement he'd signed."

Qin Feng lowered his gaze. Bai Shaonan did not get along with these old geezers who wouldn't stop trying to control him. It was not unusual for them to have a squabble every three days and a clash every five. What's more, Bai Shaonan would drag him into it every time, making him a target

of the vitriol too. But when all was said and done, he was still Bai Shaonan's subordinate. He had been branded with the Bai family's mark since his first day on the job, so it was only natural that he stood in opposition of the old geezers.

In light of this, he spoke deferentially, still keeping up the facade of a professional subordinate that he put on in front of outsiders. "Of course. The notice will be sent to Mr. Fu Ruofei tomorrow."

The duet between Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng only served to further fan the flame of Fu Ruofei's fury. He lunged forward and, grabbing Bai Shaonan's collar, said vehemently, "What bullshit father-and-son relationship! You are nothing more than what we instructed Bai Qinghe to create… mmmph!"

He didn't get to finish the rest of his sentence, as Bai Shaonan slammed a fist heavily against his stomach, following it with a chop to the back of Fu Ruofei's neck while he was doubled over in pain. The poor guy's eyes rolled back and he passed out instantly.

"Excuse me, sir, is there something the matter?"

The commotion outside finally alerted the people inside the hotel. The lobby manager had taken a look at the three men outside and instructed a heavy-set employee to go and check it out.

"No, it's nothing. We know each other. He's just drunk." Qin Feng deftly maneuvered and stopped the hotel staff from getting close.

"But…" The hotel staff peered at Fu Ruofei, who was clearly unconscious, and found Qin Feng's words a little hard to believe.

"I said. He's just. Drunk," Qin Feng emphasized, his tone much stiffer than before, and as he spoke, a red glint flashed across his eyes, piercing the staff member like a sharp blade.

"Oh… I understand. He's just drunk." A confused expression appeared on the staff member's face, the corner of his mouth curved up oddly, but still, he was able to perfectly replicate Qin Feng's words.

"Go back and tell your manager that we will be leaving shortly," Qin Feng ordered again.

"Yes. I understand."

Meanwhile, Bai Shaonan took it upon himself to pack Fu Ruofei into the back seat like a sardine. He slammed the door shut and said at last, as he watched the staff member's retreating figure, "Such heavy-handed suggestion isn't necessary, is it?"

Qin Feng shot a glance at Bai Shaonan. "Did you know that you didn't have a shadow from the moment you stepped out of the hotel?"

Bai Shaonan glanced down and immediately cursed, "Shit. Why didn't you remind me?"

"Didn't you say you had diarrhea for a whole hour?" Qin Feng said innocently. "I thought you didn't have the energy to summon it."

"It's this body—there's something wrong with it. I'll talk to my father when I get back. These fake bodies need to be sent back for maintenance; they can't keep giving them out to ghosts like this." With a wave of his hand, Bai Shaonan's shadow appeared at his feet. "Tch, and don't get me started on that Fu Ruofei. He would use anything that Father gives him. Drive him back, Qin Feng. I'll walk around for a bit first."

Qin Feng disapproved. "You only just changed that thing out for a new one—it's not suited for strenuous exercise just yet. If you're really feeling icky about the one in the car, just move him into the trunk."

Once again, Bai Shaonan experienced just how heartless this subordinate of his was. He silently warned himself not to provoke the other man. "Nah, I just wanted to take a walk. I won't do anything."

Qin Feng was also used to his boss's occasional spontaneity, and so didn't say anything more, only reminded, "I want to see you sitting in the office at exactly 9 p.m. tomorrow."

"Understood."

In the corner of a back alley, a ghost was in contemplation about how best to spend his newly acquired ghost "life."

The older generations always said once you die, ghostly guards would come to take you away to hell. But he'd been dead for almost five days, and no hell guard had come for him. After developing the suspicion that he'd been entirely forgotten by the underworld, he started to think about what he should do to while away the time.

And suddenly, an epiphany—he wanted to become a malevolent spirit. Specifically, one that would be worshipped by thousands.

He thought it was a pretty good dream, never mind why anyone in this world would prostrate at the feet of a malevolent spirit. First of all, the goal was grand enough, and to pursue it required a large amount of time—the one thing he had more than plenty of. Furthermore, he already met the entry conditions, since after all, one must first become a ghost to become a malevolent spirit. Last but not least, it was a flexible goal—he could simplify it down to "be a malevolent spirit" if he had trouble achieving his original ambition.

The first target he set his eyes on was a young blond man who walked into the alley late at night. For a victim to walk a deserted path at this hour with headphones on—listening to a ghost story nonetheless—the freshly self-proclaimed poltergeist would be doing himself a disservice not to go for it.

The young man couldn't see him, but still he floated sneakily up to the victim's ear and listened in on the story. He planned to interject a few classic ghostly lines during the breaks in the dialogue; something like "I have a grudddgge."

It was important that the word "grudge" be dragged out so the listener could hear the quivers at the end. This was so that the resentment in the words could shine through. At least, that was what he thought.

God helps ghosts who help themselves, and so opportunity presented itself not five minutes later. He hurriedly leaned into the young man's ear

and let out a low, quivery, "I have a grudddgge."

But wait. Why did his voice sound so girly when he was clearly a male ghost—WAIT! His voice had somehow coincided with the voice of the narrator in the headphones, the one who voiced the female ghost!

Their voices overlapped so perfectly, whether it was the tone, cadence, or when they started speaking. His voice matched so well it was as if he'd been speaking in falsetto.

Damn it. Turns out classic lines are stereotypes for a reason!

He wanted to run headfirst into a wall and die. No, wait—he was already dead.

"What the fuck, surround sound?!" The young man was clearly startled, but the reason for his astonishment was not what the ghostling had envisioned. He was merely marveling at the wonders of rapidly developing technology.

And thus, the ghostling's first foray into ghosthood was a clear loss. He reluctantly followed the young blond man's receding figure with his eyes, while inwardly consoling himself that even the greatest heroes had stumbles in their time.

"Failures are the stepping stones to success. Again!"

He pumped himself up and started to search for a new target. This time, he set his sights on a man who had just freed himself from some late-night overtime work. Suit-clad and walking with an unsteady gait—it was clear that he was already drained of at least eighty percent of his energy.

A person like this was an easy score.

Having learned from experience, he did not wait for some kind of heavenly sign to point out an opportunity this time. Instead, he was going to charge right up close and terrorize the man. He took in a deep breath. In any case, humans couldn't see him. He decided to launch a full-frontal attack. To his surprise, as soon as he stepped up, the man stilled his steps and stared straight forward, as if in thought.

The ghostling stiffened out of reflex. The man's gaze made him feel like he'd been seen through. But he quickly remembered that humans shouldn't be able to see him, so he gathered up his courage once again and… drifted forward one millimeter.

"What are you doing?" the man suddenly spoke up. His courteous tone gave off an impression of kindness, but even a moron knew that someone who would talk to the "air" at this time of night could not possibly be all that kind.

Alas, the ghostling was evidently even worse than a moron. To the man's question, he naively responded with his own. "You're talking to me?"

The man smiled as if he hadn't expected this kind of response. He took his hands out of his pockets and said, "Looks like you died just recently? Otherwise you would've gotten out of my way immediately instead of daring to stop me like this."

The ghostling blinked, not quite knowing how to respond at first. By the logic of the TV dramas he'd consumed in the past, could this person possibly be…

It was then that the man reached out with lightning speed and clamped his left hand around the new ghost's neck. Before the ghostling recovered enough to react, he felt an immense pressure crash over him, as if it would rip him to pieces and force him to combust on the spot.

"I might've promised Qin Feng that I wouldn't do anything over the top, but eliminating a ghostling is a piece of cake." The man was not some poor overtime worker, but Bai Shaonan, who had just left Qin Feng and was looking all around for a punching bag.

"I won't do it again! I'll reflect and change and become a brand-new ghost! Please have mercy on me, oh Lord Cultivator!"

Bai Shaonan brought his hand up to his cheek in puzzlement. Cultivator? Did he have a cultivator's face?

"I'll give you one chance—answer me honestly, otherwise the only thing that awaits you is complete and total annihilation." Bai Shaonan let the ghostling go, but kept his hand loosely circled around the ghostling's neck, ready to attack again at any moment.

"Please go ahead, Mister-Cultivator-sir!"

"What exactly about me is reminding you of a cultivator? Speak!"

"…" Noticing the furious expression on Bai Shaonan's face, the ghostling's brain finally logged online and shrewdly avoided a direct answer. "I… I was going to become a malevolent spirit, and then you showed up to vanquish me—isn't that right?"

Bai Shaonan's brows furrowed before quickly relaxing again. This little ghostling was clever enough that he didn't actually list out specific features that made him resemble a cultivator, otherwise Bai Shaonan would most certainly remove him from the face of the earth as well as the underworld.

"So you want to be a malevolent spirit?" Bai Shaonan asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I… I want to… Hm. I want tens of thousands of people to kneel down before me."

"You should get that head checked. Although, this late-stage illusions-of-grandeur syndrome of yours is probably untreatable." Bai Shaonan gave the ghostling a brief once-over, finding no trace of negative energy on him—he was even a little pretty, especially those eyes that were as clear as water. A ghost like this would do well to go back into the reincarnation cycle rather than become a malevolent spirit.

Of course, there were also handsome, stunning, well-dressed, and drop-dead gorgeous people like himself who had ended up as malevolent spirits. Bai Shaonan glanced at the ghostling again as a wild idea started to take took root in his mind.

He, who usually never used his feet if he could take a car, made the choice to walk back tonight, and had subsequently run into this little ghostling—could it be fate?

Either way, he would be the one who picked up this little ghost and brought him back, thus branding him with his own name in the eyes of those old geezers. If the little ghost was successful, it would be of great help to him. And if the little ghost failed, there would be next to no impact on himself—after all, it was only a puny new ghost.

The more Bai Shaonan thought about it, the more convinced he was of this idea. "So you want to be a malevolent spirit?" he said to the ghostling, who was standing there docilely with no intention of running away.

The ghostling had no idea what Bai Shaonan was planning, and hastened to declare his devotion of quitting the criminal life. "No, no, no, I won't do that anymore."

"Tsk, that's not what I'm talking about." Bai Shaonan pulled a piece of crumpled paper out of his left pants pocket, then took a pen out of his right, and handing both to the ghostling, said, "You have two options right now: one, fill this out; or two, total annihilation."

The ghostling took the paper without a second of hesitation. He assumed the Lord Cultivator, sir, wanted him to sign some kind of promise, but upon seeing the words on the page, he was stricken in place.

University of the Underworld - Northern Hell Campus - Professional Malevolent Spirits and Creative Terrorizing Degree Program Enrollment Application

Professional Malevolent Spirits???

Creative Terrorizing???

University of the Underworld???

The ghostling lifted his disbelieving gaze from the application form and once again settled it on the suited man in front of him. *Isn't this guy a*

cultivator? he thought. *Where the hell did he get this thing that I've never even heard of?*

Once Bai Shaonan had made up his mind, there was no changing it even with the power of ten bulls. He switched to the tone of an understanding older brother. "Didn't you want to be a malevolent spirit? You should know that every ghost these days is busting its head trying to become one. If you want to stand out from the crowd, you'll first have to build your skills, otherwise you will never beat the others, not in a million years."

The little ghost continued to be speechless. He needed some time to accept the fact that this cultivator here had suddenly done a full turn and wanted to teach him how to become a malevolent spirit.

The understanding older bro Bai Shaonan paid no attention to the psychological damage the little ghost had just incurred as he continued pushing his sales pitch. "The Professional Malevolent Spirits and Creative Terrorizing Degree Program focuses on practicality, and keeps up with the needs of the times. The students will learn about the culture behind malevolent spirits from all angles, and in turn, understand the ever-changing challenges and predicaments of the modern world of malevolent spirits.

"Through lectures, observations, and practical fieldwork, you will apply the knowledge you gain to your own terrorizing, learning how to avoid breaching the Malevolent Spirits Bylaws that will get you arrested by the Black and White Impermanence and other underworld officials, while at the same time elevating your own competitive edge. It's the must-have bachelor's degree for all ghosts who want to become malevolent spirits."

The ghostling gazed upon Bai Shaonan's ranting face. As stupid as he was, he finally understood that the man standing before him was no cultivator, but very possibly a member of the admissions office for this bizarre program. Despite his confusion regarding why a human would want

to entice ghosts to become malevolent spirits, he very pragmatically brought up an important point: "I don't have money for tuition."

Bai Shaonan answered without a pause. "We have bursaries. Even the last place in class gets a bursary to encourage improvement. And if you really don't have money, you can request that people burn joss paper for you—that's also one of the mandatory lessons."

The ghostling had somewhat calmed himself after the initial shock. Just as Bai Shaonan said, he could either enroll in this school, or he could say goodbye to the world forever. He had no other choice.

"Who are you really? Are you a teacher in this program?"

"No. As you can see, I am a malevolent spirit, and also the dean of the University of the Underworld Northern Hell Campus—Bai Shaonan. I happened to come up to the human realm today, and as destiny would have it, decided to admit you in spite of the rules. So? Do you not want to join?"

The ghostling looked down—even standing under the streetlamp, there was no trace of shadow to be seen at Bai Shaonan's feet. His belief solidified. And upon hearing the threatening tone in the other ghost's words, he hastened to accept. "I do! Only, I don't have any memories of my life before death. My name, my age, how I died—I don't remember any of it, just that I might've been a university student."

"How many days has it been since you died? Have you seen your own corpse yet?" Bai Shaonan cocked his head and asked.

The ghostling bowed his head in sorrow. "I was right here when I opened my eyes. It's been five days since I died, and still no ghostly guard has come to get me."

"What, do you really wish to see them?" Bai Shaonan scoffed. It was uncommon to have absolutely no memories of one's past life, but it wasn't anything that hell hadn't dealt with before, so he naturally didn't think much of it. "And if you don't have a name, can't you just make up a new one?"

"Is that all right?"

"It is if I say so."

He was certain that Judge Yanluo wouldn't have the time to go after him. As long as Bai Shaonan was compliant when needed, the king of the underworld didn't care to interfere with such trifles. He peered at the ghostling, who was thinking hard on a new name, and gave their surroundings a once-over, stopping his gaze at a billboard on a nearby wall.

Against a bright red and brown backdrop, a large yellow slogan dominated most of the poster: "WINDY DAYS ARE HERE, IT'S HOTPOT TIME! MAJOR CUT-BACK ON HOTPOT INGREDIENTS AT THE YUE-LE SUPERMARKET!"

"You'll be called *chui*, wind…" Bai Shaonan trailed off, reading off the poster before coming upon a similar-sounding surname. "Uh, I mean, you'll be called Cui… uh, Yue! Cui Yue!" With eyes still on the visually offensive billboard, Bai Shaonan tried desperately to hold in what he was originally going to say: you'll be called Cui Hotpot.

The ghostling followed Bai Shaonan's gaze to the billboard. He clearly seemed a little unhappy about the source of inspiration behind the name "Cui Yue."

"What's wrong, Cui Yue? Do you not like this name?"

How could he not? Any display of displeasure was sure to be met with another threat. He might as well accept his fate. Cui Yue withdrew his gaze, consoling himself with the thought that at least the esteemed dean did not give him a name like "Cui Side-dish" or "Cui Cut-back."

The operational logistics of hell resembled the human realm in some ways, but not in others.

Thanks to the humans' regular deliveries of contemporary objects to the underworld via burning things, everything the human world had, hell naturally did as well, from large department stores to smartphones. Recently, with the emergence of IMAX theaters, some performance enthusiasts who

had long been in line for reincarnation left the queue one by one. There was word that a ghostly production of *Dream of the Red Chamber* was underway. This received widespread and enthusiastic support from the masses of ghosts and ghouls alike.

Qin Feng never paid attention to these mundane trifles. He stepped into his office every night at nine o'clock sharp to begin his day's work. This was the difference between hell and earth—here, working hours began at nine o'clock in the evening and ended at five o'clock the next morning. Eight o'clock evening time was the height of rush hour, when every ghost was crowded onto their commute to work.

At a minute past nine, Bai Shaonan appeared.

Qin Feng looked up from his computer. It might be a minute later than what he ordered the day before, but seeing as Bai Shaonan usually didn't appear until eleven o'clock, this was already a vast improvement. But even as he was thinking this, he noticed the addition of a little tagalong behind Bai Shaonan.

"Who's this?" Qin Feng swiftly looked over the unfamiliar ghost, then back at Bai Shaonan, teasing, "Only one night of frolicking and you've already brought back a son?"

"Nah, more like I finally decided to bring him out in the open after all these years in hiding." Bai Shaonan went along with the joke before saying, "Cui Yue, this is my secretary, Qin Feng. You can give him the application form."

Cui Yue had sensed the unfriendly gaze from this other ghost as soon as he entered the room. Bai Shaonan was a ghost with a deceiving appearance that, upon cutting open, would reveal a dark center. Qin Feng, on the other hand, was someone who wore his darkness on his sleeve with no intention of hiding it.

Bai Shaonan was not someone to be messed with, and Qin Feng even less so. As soon as this hierarchy emerged in his mind, Cui Yue rushed to

hand his completed application form to Qin Feng, but not before saying ingratiatingly, "Sorry for the trouble, Professor."

Qin Feng took the form, and saw in the corner of his eyes that Bai Shaonan had already plopped down in his seat, looking for all intents and purposes like he had washed his hands of this ordeal. Qin Feng felt his own eye twitch, and gestured for Cui Yue to have a seat on the nearby guest sofa.

Guessing that Qin Feng was in a bad mood, not only did Cui Yue sit down obediently but he also made sure to stay completely silent. As far as he was concerned, he'd rather they not consider him at all, or even better, leave him to the side in neglect.

Qin Feng went through the motions of looking over the application, but secretly, he paid close attention to Cui Yue's every move. Judging by Bai Shaonan's habit of doing whatever he wanted, Qin Feng had reason to believe that Cui Yue must be a similarly difficult person. He was therefore surprised when Cui Yue sat down and thereafter stayed totally still. If an unwitting ghost had come in at this time, they'd think there was a new statue in the room.

"He's not bad, huh? As far as new ghosts are concerned, he's one of the quiet ones." Bai Shaonan opened a drawer, took out a little container of black goji berries, and brewed them in some water to drink. It was something he'd rummaged out of the house of some old ghost who refused to enter reincarnation and wouldn't stop breaking the law. Of course, the ghost had already been made to spontaneously poof into scattered dust under the intimation of ghostly guards.

Upon remembering that old ghost, Bai Shaonan took a sip of the goji tea and let out a lamenting sigh—the old man's progeny was so filial as to send him goji berries in the underworld. Since when had ghosts become so obsessed with wellness and health?

But what a nice little windfall it was for himself.

At the sound of Bai Shaonan's sigh, Qin Feng looked up from the papers he was reading. His gaze was bordering on hostile as it focused on his boss. "Have you looked at these forms?"

Bai Shaonan's hands stilled in the midst of pouring incense ash into his goji tea. Against Qin Feng's chilling interrogation, he chose decisively to tell the truth: "No."

"I thought as much." Qin Feng smirked.

Bai Shaonan was about to respond when Qin Feng audibly smacked the application form onto his face. He dared not complain as he took the papers, but by the time he finished reading the words on the page, his own face had darkened.

Please state your reason for applying to this program: A dean named Bai Shaonan said I would die if I don't.

Please provide proof that you have the financial means to pay for the tuition: Bai Shaonan said that even the last place in class will get money.

Please list your history of terrorizing people: Tried and failed to scare Bai Shaonan.

Do you have a record of breaking the Malevolent Spirits Bylaws prior to your entry into the program (e.g., terrorizing a human to death)? If so, please list below: If Bai Shaonan kills me, will that count as a crime?

Please name the ghost who referred you: Bai Shaonan

Your relation to your ghost reference: I thought he was a human and wanted to scare him but found out up close that he doesn't have a shadow and is a ghost.

Other: Where should I go to file a complaint about Bai Shaonan forcibly changing my name?

Bai Shaonan quietly set down the papers and sat up straight, preparing to launch into a tirade. However, Qin Feng had floated up to Cui Yue at breakneck speed and was already warmly shaking hands with the new ghost.

"We are fellow sufferers of the same ghostly torment, comrade. I have also been through the trying ordeal of being forcibly renamed by that do-nothing dean." The innately evil Qin Feng had two major hobbies: one was work, and the other was seizing every opportunity to dis Bai Shaonan. Presented with this incredible opportunity, he couldn't let it go, of course.

"Not you too, sir? But your name doesn't sound bad at all…" Cui Yue was a little surprised—was one of Bai Shaonan's interests renaming other ghosts?

"Not bad, your ass. The uncultured Bai Shaonan found it while flipping through the *Book of Songs*," Qin Feng said disdainfully. He didn't know to fight back before when he was an innocent and naive ghostling. It was only after working for Bai Shaonan that his wily nature had risen to the surface.

"You're lucky that it was the *Book of Songs*. My name came from a hotpot advertisement." Perhaps due to their similar suffering, Cui Yue suddenly felt much closer to Qin Feng.

"You should be content that I didn't change your name to the title of the poem. Otherwise you'd be Qin Jianjia and named after some reeds." Bai Shaonan couldn't help but retort at Qin Feng, seeing the two ghosts getting along so well they almost seemed ready to be soulmates. He waved the application form in his hand and gave Cui Yue a fake smile. "Not bad, little hotpot. Trying to tell on me, are you?"

The little hotpot Cui Yue only just now remembered what he had impulsively written down the day before and shrugged nervously. He was sure that this would be his last day living as a ghost.

"I think little Cui Yue simply wrote down what was on his mind," Qin Feng spoke up. "It's a true rarity these days to see such an earnest ghostly talent. Besides, I don't think there's anything wrong with his application."

Bai Shaonan stared at his traitorous secretary. "Then why did you smack the papers onto my face?"

"You appeared without a shadow twice in one night, and you call yourself a dean." Qin Feng gave Bai Shaonan a cold look before floating back to his desk and handed a set of documents to Cui Yue. "These are the actual enrollment documents. The ones the dean gave you were the old versions. Fill these out and take them to the admissions office on the fifth floor."

Cui Yue took the documents and, though they'd been chatting up a rapport, immediately left Qin Feng behind as he floated away without a backward glance. Finally, he could leave this terrible room. The two malevolent spirits were really stressing him out!

"Aha, your victims alliance just collapsed." A hint of a smile flashed across Bai Shaonan's eyes.

"So, what's going on with the new ghost?" Qin Feng ignored Bai Shaonan's taunting and went back to his usual, aloof self.

Bai Shaonan knew that Qin Feng was genuinely asking, and so dropped the joking act. "He stood before me yesterday—he looked at me, and I looked at him—then he said he wanted to be a malevolent spirit. I thought why not take him? And so here we are."

Qin Feng was quiet for a moment. If one were to switch out the words "he wanted to be a malevolent spirit" for "I love you," then it was most certainly a confession scene. But he didn't mock the other man for it.

Bai Shaonan was a ghost ignorant on all matters of love; this was a fact universally acknowledged by all ghostkind. The biggest evidence of this was that all ghosts knew how Bai Qinghe regarded this "son" of his, but Bai Shaonan was the only one who didn't feel it at all. He would treat Bai Qinghe according to "the due responsibilities of a son," which turned Bai Qinghe into a joke in the eyes of many other ghosts.

"You like Cui Yue?" Qin Feng wasn't entirely certain if the "he looked at me, I looked at him" was so-called love at first sight. If Bai Shaonan didn't even feel anything for Bai Qinghe, then there was no reason he would have any feelings for a ghost he had just met. But the reality now was Bai

Shaonan had not only brought the ghost back of his own volition, but personally renamed him. Qin Feng couldn't help but suspect that something was a little off with his boss.

"Bullshit. Is he as handsome as yours truly?" Bai Shaonan scowled.

"That better be the truth."

Qin Feng didn't keep digging, but to himself he thought, this was the first time in years that Bai Shaonan wanted to interact with other ghosts—he must keep a close eye on this Cui Yue.

And at the same time, it'd be best if he kept word from getting out. If Bai Qinghe knew, he would surely go mad.

Meanwhile, once Cui Yue handed the completed forms to the desk of the admissions office, he had an alarming realization: why had he so obediently come to submit the forms when neither Qin Feng nor Bai Shaonan were even here?

He should have taken this opportunity to run away.

Behind the admissions desk, the ghostly receptionist wore a tightly pulled back hairdo and a neatly pressed blouse. Everything about her signaled an emphasis on tradition. At this very second, her sharp, meticulous gaze was fixed on Cui Yue's application as though she was witnessing a newly graduated intern draw cartoon sheep on a report for the CEO. Seeing how serious the ghostly receptionist was, Cui Yue also started to seriously ask himself: if he tried to escape now, would this young lady float out from her seat behind the desk and run him down?

His conclusion was yes, she would.

And so he decided to wait and see. After all, any normally functioning ghost would not admit him upon seeing an almost empty enrollment application.

Of course, a certain ghost with the Bai surname was outside the range of normal ghosts, obviously.

"We cannot process your application, Mr. Cui. First of all, our institution has never accepted new students after the semester has already started. Secondly, you have absolutely no relevant experience in this field. We don't see the necessity to admit a new student at this moment in time." The young lady was being courteous, but what she meant between the lines was: not approved, fuck off.

"Is that so? I completely understand your concerns, ma'am. Just pretend I was never here." Cui Yue acted out his dejection on his face, but inside he was glad. He hadn't intentionally gone against Bai Shaonan's wishes; it was that he simply didn't meet the admission requirements.

The young lady thought that a guy who dared to submit an application of this caliber would probably put up some resistance, but to her surprise, he only gave her a decisive nod before turning to leave.

What was he doing here then? Was he just bored and looking for something to do? Just as she was staring after his retreating figure, her brows knit into a knot. Two tall and large ghostly shadows appeared at the door of the admissions office, blocking Cui Yue's path.

A moment ago, Cui Yue's expression had been one of carefreeness, his slightly parted lips poised to hum a couple of ditties in celebration. He even had the lyrics conjured up in his mind when he heard that familiar, unshakable male voice ring out with a smile, "Oh, little hotpot, are you done?"

Cui Yue looked up to see the two pairs of eyes of both Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng looking at him, and immediately transformed from an elegant gentleghost gracefully taking his leave to a blossom that shriveled before it could even bloom. These two must have waited here for him because they saw through his intention of ditching school, or so Cui Yue thought. On the surface, he shrewdly maintained the excuse he made up earlier. "I can't enroll. I don't meet the admission requirements."

This outward display of acquiescence, coupled with the rebellious glint in his eyes, unexpectedly delighted Bai Shaonan. He narrowed his eyes and shot Cui Yue a glance. It was a look brimming with covetous determination that he himself failed to notice.

Qin Feng closed his own eyes in resignation. No one with eyes to see the way Bai Shaonan looked right now would believe that he didn't feel anything for Cui Yue.

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it for you," so Bai Shaonan said, before floating in so few steps up to the reception desk. He asked of the slack-jawed staff, "Where's Cui Yue's application?"

The young woman stared at Bai Shaonan, who rarely if ever showed up here, before belatedly realizing that it was the esteemed dean himself speaking to her at the moment, and got in such a panic that her cheeks flushed red. Her words, when she managed to get them out, were also in broken fragments, "It's… here… No, no, there… Hold on, I… I've put it away…"

Bai Shaonan called himself the number one most beautiful ghost in the University of the Underworld Northern Hell Campus, but even if he humbled himself to second place, no ghost would dare to claim first. After all, he was someone who would demand with his fists that the other ghost show him exactly how they were more handsome. With his boundless grace, he forgave the way his subordinate acted and flashed her a smile that he thought was enough to mesmerize the whole world. Then he started to lie through his teeth. "The nerve of that rambunctious lad back there—he actually dared to terrorize *me* yesterday. To let this kind of ghostly talent go is to benefit other schools. Arrange for him to enroll in the program with special exceptions."

Cui Yue was taken aback. He never knew that Bai Shaonan saw such potential in him. Could it be that the dean had initiated the conversation the other night to hide the truth that he had been scared?

No wonder I had such a strong desire to become a malevolent spirit, Cui Yue thought to himself, it's because I'm an unmatched talent of my generation.

Qin Feng arched a brow as he glanced at Cui Yue's bowed head. He mistakenly took it to mean that the ghostling was displeased with Bai Shaonan's bullshit, but didn't dare point out the truth. One was a ghost who didn't know what he was truly feeling, while the other harbored discontent but dared not speak up. Where Qin Feng was concerned, these were surely ingredients for a good show.

Just like that, Qin Feng, with popcorn already in hand, missed the chance to correct Cui Yue, and in the process, enabled yet another ghost in this school with a mistaken sense of self-awareness.

Following the boss's orders, the young woman quickly processed Cui Yue's enrollment application, and even managed to create his student ID and arrange for his on-campus dormitory.

"We've gotten in touch with the people at the dormitory to secure a spot for him, but space has always been a little tight, so they said they'll need four days to set it up for him. It so happens that four days later is a Sunday—why don't we have our pupil, Cui, here start next Monday?"

Bai Shaonan only wanted Cui Yue to "become a student" but was not very particular as to how he would get there. He tossed the student ID into Cui Yue's hand and met the eyes of one who was close to despair. "Pupil Cui, welcome to the University of the Underworld, Northern Hell Campus. Come, let big brother dean show you around."

The resentment in Cui Yue's eyes did not escape Bai Shaonan's notice, but still he dragged the ghost everywhere with great enthusiasm. Meanwhile, the other students watched on curiously as their dean gave a warm welcome to a new ghost they'd never met, and thereafter entrenched this event deep into their memories. As news of Cui Yue's enrollment got out, rumors went flying around the school: that Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng had finally gotten

together and given birth to a bastard son; a ghost realm version of a CEO power romance; a love triangle between Bai Shaonan, Qin Feng, and Cui Yue… Whether the plot was vengeance, fluff, melodrama, hot-blooded righteousness, or dark workplace realities, there was a rumor to fit every trope one could think of.

After all, whatever reason Bai Shaonan used to get Cui Yue into the school, the dual presence of him and Qin Feng at the admissions office alone was enough to let every ghost know that Cui Yue's admission was a product of nepotism.

At that moment, Cui Yue had no idea that he was about to become the center of all the spectral drama at this school. Despairingly, he forced himself to accept another tragic reality: not only did he have to go to school when he was alive, he had to keep going to school even after death. He also cursed out Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng in his mind at the same time, for somehow, they were both able to toss work aside in order to tour the campus with him.

Bai Shaonan finally showed mercy and released Cui Yue after their tour took them through the toilet facilities, but not before dropping a huge bomb on him: "Since your dorm isn't ready yet, you can stay at my place for now —you were there last night, so it's not anything new to you. Qin Feng already arranged for your school supplies. See if there's anything missing, and let him know."

Cui Yue never expected Bai Shaonan to go to such lengths. He hurried to say, "I don't need—"

"What do you mean you 'don't need'?" Bai Shaonan cut him off impatiently. "Do you have a computer you can use to write reports and watch porn at the same time? Do you have a phone that lets you talk shit about the teachers with the other students? Do you have a notebook you can doodle on in class? No, you don't. You don't have anything. You're only a broke-ass ghost with nothing to his name."

Cui Yue moved his lips, but nothing came out. After all, Bai Shaonan was fucking right—he didn't have a dime on him. And as someone who had only just died, he *was* a broke-ass ghost.

Qin Feng quietly cleared his throat. "The dean would not say such things that were uttered just now. You can shut your mouth and not repeat that again. I believe Pupil Cui already understood what you meant."

Bai Shaonan stroked his self-acclaimed Adonis-like chin. "By the way, a word of advice, Pupil Cui—now that you're enrolled, don't think about ditching class. We are a well-established school. Even if you run to the corners of the earth, we'll still be able to get you back."

The corner of Cui Yue's eye twitched as he quietly shifted his gaze over to Qin Feng, asking with his eyes, *Is it really all right to say these things to a student*?

Qin Feng was long used to his boss's occasional ridiculous outbursts. Besides, he'd already ruled out Cui Yue as a dangerous outsider, and naturally didn't think it was a big deal, though the little ghost was clearly unused to such things. "You can pretend that you didn't hear it," he consoled.

Bai Shaonan scoffed coldly. He dared to snap at heaven or hell alike, but he didn't dare snap at Qin Feng.

"Oh, there you are, Dean Bai," a deep male voice rang from behind them.

A cold glint flashed across Bai Shaonan's eyes, though just a moment ago he had still been putting up a show of anger. "And what brought you here today?" he said coolly as he turned halfway toward the newcomer.

Cui Yue withdrew, pulling his shoulders back uneasily. It was cold enough in the underworld with the absence of the sun, but stacked on top of that, the vicious chill emanating from Bai Shaonan that practically screamed "stay away" made a completely inexperienced fresh ghost like him extremely uncomfortable.

Qin Feng floated up to them and dragged Cui Yue away from Bai Shaonan's side. "Pupil Cui, this is the chair of our school's board of directors, Mr. Fu Zhaoyi."

Qin Feng's words distracted Cui Yue so that he didn't even mind being dragged. "Good day, Professor Fu. I'm Cui Yue from the… uh, the Professional Malevolent Spirits program…" he said to the unusually well-dressed middle-aged man.

Cui Yue's words were weak even as he spoke them out loud. If possible, he'd rather not mention his major of study at all.

Fu Zhaoyi nodded absentmindedly. He was here for Bai Shaonan—student matters were not of his concern.

"Dean Bai, I heard about what happened with Ruofei."

"I thought you two didn't get along, why are you here now trying to get even for him?" Bai Shaonan rolled his eyes.

"Dean Bai, don't speak of baseless rumors in front of students." Fu Zhaoyi smiled wanly. "As a member of the school's board of directors, I have a responsibility to advise you on your behavior."

"You have done your advising." Bai Shaonan folded his arms contemptuously. "You can leave now."

Fu Zhaoyi shook his head and laughed soundlessly—it wasn't the first day that Bai Shaonan had treated him like this— this special treatment was a blessing bestowed to not only him, but every member of the board. Though he wasn't too broken up about it. A dog that bared its teeth at you was better than a dog that feigned obedience but stabbed you in the back.

"Well, my job here is done, so I will take my leave now. Oh, right, Dean Bai—I put the documents on your desk. Remember to look at them when you get back."

A raging fury swarmed from Bai Shaonan's eyes. Fortunately, he still remembered that Cui Yue was there. He shouldn't scare the future star pupil before he even started class. However, the voice that escaped from his

gritted teeth still perfectly mimed the air pressure of Siberia, while his murderous expression was horrifying enough to leave a psychological scar in Cui Yue's mind. "I locked the door when I left."

"Am I not allowed to enter your room?" Fu Zhaoyi's expression was one of nonchalance.

It was then that Qin Feng spoke up. "It's late, Mr. Fu. You should be getting back."

He saw through with a single glance that Fu Zhaoyi was making trouble on account of Fu Ruofei's incident. Bai Shaonan's reason for disliking the board was simple: they had always treated Bai Shaonan as a tool to be used when convenient, then set aside when not. They did as they liked, using Bai Qinghe's research funding as leverage to force the ghost in question to do as they said.

Fu Zhaoyi letting himself into Bai Shaonan's room was not only a breach of privacy but was once again emphasizing the fact that he had no regard for Bai Shaonan at all.

Bai Shaonan could also see what Fu Zhaoyi was trying to do. The other ghost's actions were akin to a slap in the face—it was no wonder he was furious.

Fu Zhaoyi glanced at the cool and collected Qin Feng, then at the student, whose face had gone deathly pale, and finally at Bai Shaonan, who was a volcano on the verge of eruption. He decided to let up. "All right then, that's all for now. Qin Feng, remember to notify your boss that the matter has to be dealt with in two weeks' time."

"If Mr. Fu would be kind enough to cease talking, this ghost will naturally remind him. But if Mr. Fu continues to ramble on and refuses to go, then I can't make any guarantees," Qin Feng said, to Fu Zhaoyi's surprise.

Fu Zhaoyi's face darkened. Anyone who could sit at the head of the board of directors was undoubtedly a ghost of the upper-class nobility.

Aside from Qin Feng, no other soul dared put him down like this. However, at the thought of Qin Feng's strength, there was nothing he could do no matter how angry he was. He ended up turning to depart, leaving only a begrudging "What a loyal piece of weed" in his wake.

Bai Shaonan's fury reluctantly subsided only after he watched Fu Zhaoyi's figure recede completely from his view. He shot a sideways glance at Cui Yue, who was held in place by Qin Feng's grip, and said with a fake smile, "All righty, now how should we deal with a new student who has just witnessed a conflict between our high-level executives?"

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02

Bai Shaonan had mentioned that the U of U Northern Hell Campus was a well-established institution. Naturally, what emerged in Cui Yue's imagination were the gang plots in movies where people were stuffed in cement barrels and tossed into the sea. He stared wide-eyed and horrified at Bai Shaonan and then at Qin Feng. To him, the methods with which these two ghosts had coerced him into enrolling in this school were no different than the way gangs in movies forced people to become porn actors to pay off debts. He was suddenly so terrified that words started spewing out of his mouth without a filter. "Are— Are you guys going to kill me now?"

Bai Shaonan paused. To be quite honest, he was only trying to frighten Cui Yue as a joke. He hadn't expected the ghostling's imagination to go so wild as to assume he would kill a ghost to shut him up for good.

In that case, he very well couldn't let Cui Yue down.

"Then should I just let you run around and blab to every ghost about what just happened?"

"I'm not a loudmouthed person! Wait, no. I *am* a loudmouthed ghost. No, no. I mean to say, I'm *not* a loudmouthed ghost!"

"So what if you are, and what if you're not. This is a deserted hallway. Even if you scream your lungs out, no ghost will come to save you!"

"HELP—"

Qin Feng originally planned to watch from the side as the show unfolded, but halfway through, he realized his superior's lines were getting

worse by the word. Resigned, he reached out a hand to stop Cui Yue before the ghostling could escape. “Pupil Cui, what did you see just now?”

Cui Yue was terrified and didn’t dare move an inch. He misinterpreted Qin Feng’s gesture as an act of aggression, so naturally didn’t hear what the other ghost was saying. “See— See what?”

“What did you see just now?” Qin Feng repeated, hinting heavily.

This time Cui Yue understood what Qin Feng meant and immediately answered, “I don’t know anything! I was just passing by. I don’t know anything!”

“This is to say that just now, you didn’t see or hear anything?”

“That’s right!”

Qin Feng nodded in satisfaction before turning to Bai Shaonan. “Well, that’s great. Pupil Cui doesn’t know anything.”

Bai Shaonan watched Qin Feng’s deceptive act with cold detachment, but he eventually waved Cui Yue off. He would never actually exterminate a law-abiding citizen of the underworld. He was only teasing. Cui Yue was relieved beyond words. He floated away like a steed that could travel a thousand miles a day and was gone in a blink.

Qin Feng watched the corner of Bai Shaonan’s slightly upturned mouth with an inscrutable expression. In the past whenever the old geezers dropped by, Dean Bai would always curse and ramble for hours on end after. But now with Cui Yue here, it took only a moment for the beast’s fur to smooth back to normal.

It was good and bad at the same time.

The first thing Bai Shaonan saw when he turned around was Qin Feng staring unblinkingly at him, and immediately he developed goosebumps all over his body. “Why are you looking at me like that? I’m telling you I don’t have any feelings for you. We will not have a future together, so forget it.”

Qin Feng withdrew his gaze, and in a rare moment of mercy, did not tease Bai Shaonan about his impractical fantasies. However, the first words

out of his mouth were another deadly blow. “The old geezer is gone, so when are you going to get back to work?”

Bai Shaonan’s face fell at the question. Qin Feng agreed to let him out only because they received word that Fu Zhaoyi was coming. No one wanted to waste time entertaining the old geezer, so they decided to annoy Cui Yue with the excuse of a campus tour. Only, Fu Zhaoyi was unexpectedly persistent in tracking them down.

“I’ll go back now.” Bai Shaonan yielded under the unwavering gaze of Qin Feng the Great. As he floated back with Qin Feng, he continued, “I’m just saying, if Fu Zhaoyi made it all the way into my office, isn’t it time to change out the stuff on that door?”

“Oh, please. You know very well the little curses can’t stop them at all. At the old geezers’ level, you’re lucky if they’re held back for even fifteen minutes.” Qin Feng arrived outside the office in question and shot one glance at the tattered “Strange Ghosts Keep Out” curse that had been maliciously destroyed. “How thoughtful of him.”

Bai Shaonan rolled his eyes. Though reluctant, he still picked up the documents Fu Zhaoyi had left without further protest, hastily scanning over the names on the page and smirking. “It was one punch at Fu Ruofei. Did they have to make such a big deal out of it?”

“You’re only now realizing how petty they are?” Qin Feng also glanced at the names. His brows furled into a knot. “All these people, and you only get two weeks. There’s not enough time.”

Bai Shaonan cocked his head as he considered it, then tossed the papers back down. “Then I’ll leave first thing tomorrow morning. I’ll go back today and give the little hotpot a warning so he doesn’t get any ideas while the master ghost is away.”

Qin Feng put his head down and started working, quietly deciding to go dig out Cui Yue’s life history later.

Meanwhile, Cui Yue had no idea that he'd been secretly targeted by Qin Feng. After witnessing firsthand the face-off between Bai Shaonan and the chair of the school board, he fully bought into the idea that this was a "well-established school," and thus obligingly returned to the dean's home.

Bai Shaonan's dwelling was a two-story unit with a primarily white color scheme, though the warm-toned furnishings and decor pieces managed to bring some comfort and cheer into the otherwise chilly interior. Cui Yue hadn't noticed all this when he was here the day before. Bai Shaonan had heartlessly commanded him to scramble off to sleep on the sofa, which gave the housekeeper who had come in to clean the mistaken impression that a stupid house robber had broken in just to fall asleep.

"Your room is ready, Mr. Cui. It's the third room on the left of the second-floor hallway. Secretary Qin also sent a ghost over just now with some things he says you'll need for school. I've put them in the room for you. Mr. Cui, feel free to bring any concerns to me if there is anything amiss."

"N-No, that's quite all right. I'll just take a look myself." Cui Yue turned down the housekeeper's goodwill with utmost sincerity, then swiftly floated up to the guest room and locked the door.

When he had still lived in the human world, he was aware that some people would burn puppets made of paper to send to the netherworld as servants. However, seeing the pale-faced paper puppet standing at his height and dressed in traditional Tang garb with two circles of artificial pink blush on "her" cheeks, he had to admit that his poor heart was still not yet accustomed to these sceneries common to hell.

However, Cui Yue thought back to his reaction. It might have been a little rude to walk away like that from a ghostly servant who had just shown him kindness. And so Cui Yue, who had made it his goal to become a malevolent spirit but who was fundamentally a good boy at heart, told himself that he must give a proper greeting next time.

Cui Yue looked around the room a few times and rested his sight on the electronics on the desk—a laptop, cell phone, headphones, and SIM card, all neatly laid out, and all of them white.

Thinking about the colors in this house, Cui Yue immediately guessed whose taste had dictated these purchases. However, since he did not have half a dime to his name, he dared not have any opinions on the matter, even if the gadgets had been neon pink instead.

Cui Yue picked up the cell phone and paused for a moment upon seeing the logo on top: a watermelon with a bite taken out of it. The déjà vu rendered him speechless.

It wasn't until almost nine o'clock in the morning that Qin Feng, Bai Shaonan's fiend of a subordinate, finally allowed him to leave work and go home. Before passing through the threshold into his home, and for a reason unbeknownst to himself, Bai Shaonan rubbed his tired eyes and straightened his slightly hunched body. He put on an absurd show of appearing energized before floating inside but was greeted only by his familiar papier-mâché housekeeper.

"Mr. Cui retired to his room after dinner," the housekeeper said.

A trace of disappointment flashed across Bai Shaonan's eyes. "What did he eat?"

"Shredded pork and pickle-flavored stick incense—would you also like some?" Bai Shaonan shook his head, and the housekeeper spoke again, "Mr. Bai, please be sure to notify Mr. Bai Qinghe regarding the matter of Mr. Cui staying over."

Bai Shaonan stopped halfway through the motion of floating up the stairs. He turned, eyes sweeping over the housekeeper, and said adamantly, pausing between each word, "That's. None. Of. Your. Business."

The housekeeper did not back down in the face of Bai Shaonan's warning, and instead repeated for emphasis, "Please do notify Mr. Bai

Qinghe."

"You—" Bai Shaonan was about to erupt when he realized that the housekeeper had been sent to him by Bai Qinghe. It was obvious then who her master really was. Normally, he had nothing to hide and never minded having an extra ghost floating around his home. But now, he suddenly found her presence bothersome.

Since when did he, Bai Shaonan, have to notify Bai Qinghe about taking in a stray ghost?

But at the end of the day, Bai Qinghe was still his father. If they really duked it out, it would only benefit the board of directors. Bai Shaonan took a deep breath and suppressed his volatile temper. "Got it. I'm leaving for a business trip to the human realm tomorrow morning for two weeks. We'll talk about this when I come back."

Having said that, Bai Shaonan paid no further attention to the housekeeper and floated himself up to the second floor. Without a hint of hesitation, he let himself through the walls and into Cui Yue's room. Only papier-mâché dolls would open and close doors the way humans do. Unless a restrictive curse was set up on the door, any ghost would be able to float in and out freely.

Cui Yue had only been in the underworld for all of one day. He thought, with his still human mind, that as long as he locked the door, no one would be able to get in. Amused, Bai Shaonan looked down at Cui Yue, who had drooled all over his pillow, and laughed to himself about how naive the little fella was.

Cui Yue had no idea that there was a ghost in his room. Sound asleep, he was busy being classmates with Bai Shaonan in his dream, in which the two ghosts were sitting side by side in the classroom, listening to the teacher's feedback on their test results.

In the dream, the teacher said, "Some of you have such terrible handwriting that I can't even bear to look at. If the teacher can't decipher

the answer, naturally your score won't be very high. I won't disclose which student it is, but I wish for you all to keep this in mind. Understand, Bai Shaonan?"

At this, Cui Yue couldn't help but bang on the desk and burst out into wild laughter. He must have been quite worked up since he not only laughed out loud in his dream but in reality as well.

"HA HA— HA— HA HA HA HA HA HA HA… Haha—"

Astonishment filled Bai Shaonan's eyes as he stared at Cui Yue. He initially thought that Cui Yue was going to wake up, but to his surprise, the other ghost stayed asleep even as he laughed.

Is there… something wrong with this ghost's mind?

He had come into the room for a chat with Cui Yue, but any such inclination was dispersed by the unexpected sight of the fool. Instead of rousing Cui Yue, he would rather see how much longer the ghostling could keep up the laughter.

With this in mind, Bai Shaonan found a slip of paper on the desk and started to write down some points of precaution for Cui Yue, who continued laughing without pause the whole while. When Bai Shaonan finished the last point, Cui Yue's eyelid started fluttering, a sign that he was about to wake up any second now.

Bai Shaonan decided to commit to the bit. As he finished writing the note, he pasted it onto Cui Yue's forehead in one smooth flourish with not a shred of guilt.

Cui Yue was woken up by the sound of his own laughter. Blinking away the sleep in his eyes, he could still hear remnants of his own laugh, but immediately, the complete darkness startled him wide awake and he leapt out of bed.

"Am I being sat on by the sleep paralysis ghost right now?! Oh, wait, I'm a ghost myself…" Cui Yue yelped and finally realized that there was

something stuck to his forehead, blocking his view. He tore the piece of paper away in a panic.

The corner of Bai Shaonan's mouth twitched dramatically. A ghost, sat on by another ghost? Only Cui Yue could come up with something like that.

He wasn't surprised that Cui Yue hadn't noticed him. He had written down everything he wanted to say and had no need to waste his breath repeating it again. Bai Shaonan turned quietly around to leave when he suddenly remembered that the former occupant of this guest room—Qin Feng—had once told him something: the reason Qin Feng had turned from an adorable little lad into a conniving secretary was all because of the feng shui in this room.

Standing in the hallway, Bai Shaonan looked back at the door hesitantly. It would only be for a few days—surely the funny kid wouldn't turn into another Qin Feng?

Cui Yue quickly looked at the note's handwriting. The "Bai" in the bottom left corner was signed with such a flourish that he easily deduced who it belonged to, though he still had no idea when the other ghost had slipped inside. However, the content of the note required him to take it seriously. He fully understood why he was forbidden from entering the master bedroom and study, but what did Bai Shaonan mean by "Do not trust the housekeeper. Do not trust any high executives in the school aside from Qin Feng"?

Suddenly, something clicked in Cui Yue's mind, and he seemed to understand. Could this be the fabled office politics at play?

It must be—the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. The housekeeper downstairs must have been sent by the school's board of directors to keep an eye on Bai Shaonan, who didn't send the puppet away so as not to arouse suspicion.

As three-hundred-plus episodes of office soap operas appeared in his mind, he couldn't help but get a little excited. He'd watched a lot of

television but never thought that one day he would personally get to participate in a political conflict between clans. The chairman's surname was Fu… so it was likely a feud between the Bai clan and the Fu clan. Since Bai Shaonan was the one who had taken in Cui Yue, he had already been branded by the Bai clan as one of their own.

In those soaps, the ones who became frontline sacrifices early on were usually cannon fodder and had no idea what was happening. As a newcomer, he figured he was surely cannon fodder himself. Cui Yue's eyes took on a resolute expression. He would rather die tonight than eat anything the housekeeper cooked. What if she poisoned the food and then disposed of his body deep in the woods?

The housekeeper suddenly let out a big sneeze from downstairs.

Since Bai Shaonan mentioned in his note that he would be away on a business trip for two weeks and that Cui Yue could feel free to use his credit card should he need to spend money, Cui Yue didn't at all mind that the house was without a master ghost. He declined the meals prepared by the housekeeper, and after nearly blowing up Bai Shaonan's kitchen five times in a row, he finally resorted to ordering takeout with Bai Shaonan's money.

After all, Bai Shaonan had already spent a lot of money on the electronic gadgets, Cui Yue thought sheepishly, and the cost of takeout was nothing in comparison. He would definitely return it once he received his scholarship money in the future. Cui Yue thought he was already pushing it on the hospitality front, but he didn't expect that there would always be ghosts who would go further. When Qin Feng came to visit him the day before school started, and found out that he had been eating takeout from the golden arches of hell for the last few days, he tutted and called for a kaiseki takeout from one of the five-star hotels in the underworld and paid for it with Bai Shaonan's money. In fact, he ordered two sets and matter-of-factly dug in.

Cui Yue had never eaten such expensive food in his life, not even when he was alive. He stared dumbly at the dishes, not knowing where to start. Qin Feng noticed his hesitation, and mistook it for shock at his generosity. "No need to hold back when it's Bai Shaonan's money. You either don't use it at all, or you eat until he's broke. Understand?"

This was the first time Cui Yue had witnessed Qin Feng's indiscriminate saboteur's attitude. He was all at once unsure of how to react, so he nodded numbly.

The next day was Cui Yue's first day of school.

He declined Qin Feng's kind offer and took himself to his new dorm. Even with the new things Bai Shaonan had gotten him, he only had a total of one backpack of belongings with him. Effortlessly, he floated to the dorm room he was assigned.

The dorm was obviously not on the same level of comfort as Bai Shaonan's home. Still, Cui Yue looked around at the room that held only two beds and thought it was not bad at all.

His dorm mate wasn't here. Cui Yue quickly sorted out his own space and rushed out the door. If he was to be late on his first day of class as a member of the Bai clan, the Fu clan would surely not let it go easily. As an underling in the Bai clan, Cui Yue was very self-aware, even if Bai Shaonan was utterly unaware of this himself.

The first-year students did not have any elective courses. The school had learned the lesson that the higher up the grade, the wilder the ghosts. As a result, they commandeered the class schedules of the first years so the students could finish all the mandatory courses while their passion for learning was still existent.

Going by memory, Cui Yue managed to find his way to the classroom. The students inside were surprised to suddenly see a new face appear in their mandatory course. Then, reflecting on the rumors flying around the past few days, they all took on expressions of instant understanding.

"Hey, new ghost, are you also one of the PIGS?"

Cui Yue had enough self-awareness to know that he wasn't a good student who paid attention in class. He tended to doze off, doodle, and let his mind wander. For these reasons, he sat himself down in the last row. He was surprised then, when he saw the male ghost who was sitting in front of him float up to his left, sit down, and strike up a conversation.

"Pigs…" Cui Yue blinked. Was this ghost asking if he was a… pig?

"Not the one you're thinking of. The English name for our program is PIGS, which is short for 'Professional Ghosts and Creative Scare Scare People.' How do you not know this? Are you in the wrong classroom?" The ghost was perplexed.

"I'm not in the wrong classroom, it's just the first time I'm hearing the acronym for our program," Cui Yue said weakly. And what was with the English name? The first few words sounded fine, but what the hell was the "Scare Scare People" supposed to mean? It was like a person who wore a neatly buttoned-up shirt at the top and only underwear on the bottom. He felt like it had to be a joke.

"Really?"

The other ghost was still looking at him with suspicion, so Cui Yue had no choice but to take out his student ID to prove that he really was a pig.

"Your name is Cui Yue? Then I'll call you a-Yue from now on. Oh, right—my name is Cao Zhongnan, also a PIGS student. You can call me Cao B."

Cui Yue was flabbergasted. Cao, the surname, wasn't anything to bat an eye at, but it did sound similar to *cao*, as in "fuck." Now, this usually wouldn't be an issue, except the ghost had combined that with B—as in the internet slang for *bi*, as in "pussy." Therefore, Cao Zhongnan had just requested to be referred to as "Fuck Pussy."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure. What is it?"

"Does the 'B' in Cao B mean anything special?"

"B for Babe, as in this ghost is a babe. Unless, you want to call me Cao Babe? That's also fine by me."

The corners of Cui Yue's eyes twitched. *Is this ghost right in the head?* he thought. A whole grown-up man of a ghost, referring to himself as Babe?

Cao Zhongnan was not just wildly sociable for show; he was also friendly with the other ghosts in the class. As they were chatting, he suddenly floated up into the air and announced loudly to every ghost present, "Did you hear that? The new pig—I mean—PIGS is named Cui Yue!"

Watching Cao Zhongnan float in midair, Cui Yue could only see darkness in his own future. PIGS or not, he was certain the other ghosts would soon refer to him as a pig anyway. But come to think of it, was Bai Shaonan aware that his students had redubbed themselves as pigs?

"How old are you, Cao B? Still playing in class? Go back to your seat." A ghost with a teacherly vibe slowly floated into the classroom and immediately reprimanded Cao Zhongnan when he saw him fooling around with the other students in midair.

Cui Yue couldn't help but cover his face. What had he just heard? Had an actual university professor really used the name "Cao B" out loud?

This world was too much. Maybe he was better off going straight into reincarnation.

Cao Zhongnan stuck his tongue out sheepishly and obliged by sitting back down beside Cui Yue. Still, he couldn't help but say quietly, "Our major has the most jam-packed courses in the whole school. You better be diligent, a-Yue."

Cui Yue nodded, but inside, figured that since he had probably also been a university student while alive, that he had likely seen it all already. Surely he was capable of riding through the ups as well as the downs of the afterlife.

It turned out, the professors proved to him with solid action that the waves of PIGS were not the ripples of a mere river but a tsunami on the ocean, and one that would make a student seasick if he wasn't careful. And for someone like Cui Yue, who wasn't there on the great professors' ships from the beginning, his only fate was to fall overboard and drown.

"Modern malevolent spirits need to keep up with the times. A ghost shouldn't be limited by things like race, language, or region. As an expert malevolent spirit, you should not let go of any opportunity to terrorize people. Therefore, students of PIGS, it's time to brush up on your English, French, Japanese, Russian, German, Italian, and Thai skills!

"As a cultured sino-ghost, you cannot simply rely on big bloody words to scare people every time. This semester, I will be teaching everyone calligraphy in the forms of cursive script, regular script, running script, official script, and seal script. If you can't keep up, you better be ready to retake the course.

"Students, you need to understand this: instead of terrorizing twenty humans who don't give you much of a reaction, it's better to terrorize one human who is already fearful of us. How to look for your target and single out the fear in their heart is a mandatory part of being an expert malevolent spirit. The next two classes will focus on analyzing the theories of the renowned human psychologist Sigmund Freud. Has everybody got a copy of his book? If not, hurry and get someone to burn a copy for you.

"I know you are already studying foreign languages, but I still want to remind everyone: don't neglect what's right in front of you by setting your sights too far. This semester, I'll first teach you Hakka, Cantonese, and Shanghainese, but we'll leave the other languages for your second year.

"As malevolent spirits, the worst thing that can happen is Taoist cultivators showing up and ruining things. An average of twenty malevolent spirits die every day at the hands of Taoist cultivators, priests, and other such enemies dedicated to opposing us. Not only do we have to learn to

protect ourselves, more importantly, we have to learn their techniques so we can avoid the death traps. So, everyone better pay attention in my class."

He had gone to one week of classes and cried for a whole week. Was it really that hard to be a malevolent spirit? Was he allowed to give up?

There was no class on Saturday, so Qin Feng personally came to the dorm to visit Cui Yue, who had been a pig for five whole days.

Cui Yue didn't dare say it out loud, but the look of quitting was so obvious in his eyes that even his roommate, Cao Zhongnan, couldn't help but give him a side-eye.

Qin Feng's response to this was only a little smile. He leaned close to Cui Yue's ear and said at a volume only the two ghosts could hear, "You remember what happened in the corridor that day? You got off easy only because you're a student. Otherwise…"

He didn't clarify otherwise what, but the ambiguity was the most terrifying part.

A shudder rocked Cui Yue's whole body. No wonder Qin Feng was Bai Shaonan's best sidekick. What was this? They'd rather destroy him than give the Fu clan leverage? Naturally, the soapy clichés of his imagination had found a great excuse for Qin Feng's threat.

Qin Feng was a little surprised that Cui Yue had calmed down so quickly. He thought Cui Yue would compromise by asking him about switching majors, but didn't expect the other ghost to go quiet altogether with a determined yet tragically melancholy look emerging in his eyes. The usually unsympathetic Qin Feng hesitated in a rare moment of reflection as he wondered if he had somehow forced Cui Yue into self-martyrdom.

From Cui Yue's perspective, he had boarded the pirate ship the moment he met Bai Shaonan. If quitting school could be used against him and switching majors could be too, then it was death either way. He had no choice but to accept his fate as a studious pig.

Qin Feng never did manage to get the words "a request to switch majors may be considered" out of his mouth. Instead, he emphasized to Cao Zhongnan to take care of Cui Yue. Cao Zhongnan nodded in response, a little overwhelmed by the attention, and practically bent himself into a right angle as he saw Qin Feng out, earning him a disdainful look from Cui Yue.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Do you even know who the almighty Qin Feng is?" Cao Zhongnan complained.

"Isn't he Bai Shaonan's secretary?"

"Stupid. He's not *just* a secretary—he's a malevolent spirit who has topped the Ghoul Charts for five hundred years! Every PIGS student looks up to him as their ultimate end goal!"

He never imagined that Qin Feng was the idol of a drove of pigs. The corner of Cui Yue's mouth twitched. He suddenly had a lot less regard for Qin Feng, but he dared not say so out loud in front of Cao Zhongnan, who was still wearing an expression of reverence. Cui Yue eventually cleared his throat and changed the subject. "What's the Ghoul Chart?"

"You may be a new ghost, a-Yue, but as someone sent here personally by Dean Bai, how can you not know even the most basics?" Cao Zhongnan sighed. For the sake of gaining the almighty Qin's favor, he explained in resignation, "The Ghoul Charts rank each malevolent spirit by their Ghoul Points. The almighty Qin may look gentle, but every time he makes a move, his Ghoul Points jump up by tens of thousands."

"What are Ghoul Points?" Cui Yue followed with another question.

This time Cao Zhongnan rolled his eyes. "Obviously, they're points you get from terrorizing people. Before a malevolent spirit embarks on a mission, the Bureau of Malevolent Spirit Affairs will send a ghost to tag along so they can assess the points involved. If you want to know the standards of assessment, go ask them, not me."

Cui Yue didn't quite understand. "But… aren't there sometimes fatal hauntings in the human world? Aren't they worried that the victim will

become a ghost and lodge a complaint?"

"Those kinds of hauntings are carried out by unlicensed malevolent spirits. Even if they get obliterated by a Taoist cultivator, they would've deserved it. We'll be studying malevolent spirit law in second year and start interning in third year once we pass the licensing exam. We are good, law-abiding malevolent spirits and won't be causing any fatalities," said Cao Zhongnan.

What the heck is a good, law-abiding malevolent spirit? It was becoming increasingly difficult for Cui Yue to see what his future held, but Cao Zhongnan still looked as though he was anticipating further questions, so Cui Yue continued, "So, right now, our Ghoul Points are zero, right?"

"No way," Cao Zhongnan said as he turned on his computer, logged on to the intranet, and clicked open his student profile. "See, I already had fifteen points before I started school. That's high for a first year."

Cui Yue didn't have to think hard to know that his was zero.

Seeing Cui Yue's pensive face, Cao Zhongnan advised him considerately, "Good thing it's just the two of us here, a-Yue. If other ghosts overheard our conversation just now, they'd surely make fun of you."

Cui Yue felt a warmth wash over him. Despite only knowing Cao Zhongnan for a week, the other ghost had been very caring and accommodating of him this whole time, trying hard to help him keep up with the other PIGS academically. Just as he was about to express his gratitude, Cao Zhongnan threw a bomb at him.

"As the product of love between the almighty Qin Feng and Dean Bai, you should take initiative in the great accomplishments of your fathers instead of being totally ignorant. It'll make them sad. All right?"

"What… product of love?"

The claim was so shocking that Cui Yue was a little burnt from the impact. He was sure that if there was a ghost from the bureau of whatever

affairs present, Cao Zhongnan would've earned quite a number of points just now.

"Oh please, are they not your dads? Otherwise how did you get into PIGS with your skill level? Ours is a world-class program. You need eight Ghoul Points just to get in." Cao Zhongnan still thought Cui Yue was playing dumb.

"Of course not! Why would you think that? They're both men!"

"As long as the almighty Qin Feng is involved, anything is possible! Or perhaps you're adopted?"

"One has the surname Bai, and other one Qin, why would they have a son with the surname Cui?"

Cui Yue tried desperately to explain and ended up telling the story of how he met Bai Shaonan in the first place.

After listening to the whole thing, Cao Zhongnan's expression was one of vague disdain. He tutted a few times in succession before saying, "I had a bet with someone in the Ghostly Messenger program. I guess he won."

Cui Yue suddenly had a bad feeling. "What was the bet?"

Cao Zhongnan turned away as he said, "How you got into PIGS. I bet that you're the result of male pregnancy, and he bet that you're Dean Bai's secret love ghoul."

Cui Yue once again exploded. "What secret love ghoul?! I am not!"

Cao Zhongnan was unusually composed as he looked at Cui Yue, who had floated into midair out of agitation. "Calm down first, and I'll dissect this with you."

Cui Yue refused to calm down. He flew back and forth around the room in a fit. "No need for dissection! You guys are making up lies out of nothing!"

Cao Zhongnan thought about it for a moment, then pulled a cultivator's charm out of his desk drawer and said, "Calm down right now, or else I'll use the charm to freeze you in place."

Cui Yue widened his eyes in surprise. He couldn't believe that his roommate would use what they learned in class against him. In the face of a threat, he was quick to concede. He sat back down at his desk and puffed up his cheeks. "Evil bully."

Cao Zhongnan was unfazed—he was even a little giddy. "How else would I become a malevolent spirit?"

Cui Yue let out several consecutive *humph*s.

Cao Zhongnan didn't pay attention to Cui Yue's mini fit of temper as he continued the previous topic of conversation. "Think about it, a-Yue—Dean Bai not only did not obliterate you for getting in his way, but instead took you home and even used his position to stick you into PIGS. If this isn't love at first sight, then what is?"

As the dean of a university, the available bachelor Bai Shaonan was undoubtedly the dream ghost of many. Unfortunately, Cui Yue was a new ghost. He was weak with no background. If they suddenly got together, it would only turn Cui Yue into a pariah and the target of public scorn. For this reason, Bai Shaonan endured the pain of Cui Yue's misunderstanding and had sent him into PIGS so the new ghost could emerge with newfound prestige. Cao Zhongnan's eyes couldn't help but well up with sympathetic tears at the thought of Dean Bai's silently suffering affection and his fear of exposing Cui Yue.

As a soapy romance was playing out in Cao Zhongnan's mind, Cui Yue's expression was one of barely contained frustration. Could he possibly tell the truth about the great feud between the Bai and Fu clans? Could he explain that he was nothing more than cannon fodder?

No. He couldn't. As soon as he revealed that, Qin Feng would turn him into actual ash.

Seeing Cui Yue's unhappy expression, Cao Zhongnan thought it necessary to remind him, "Why don't you consider why Dean Bai took you in, with your potential? And why he lied to the registrar's office for you?"

"Isn't it because I'm a prodigy?" Cui Yue replied without thinking.

Cao Zhongnan was reminded of the times when Cui Yue couldn't even answer the professor's questions. He said in resignation, "Please cast aside any notion of that right now. You can't even say 'hello' properly in German. What kind of prodigy are you?"

Cui Yue was frozen in place. If he wasn't a prodigy, then why had the dean dragged Cui Yue to school when Bai Shaonan already had someone as formidable as Qin Feng?

At the sight of Cui Yue's brain malfunction, Cao Zhongnan sighed and stood up. "I'm going to buy us two set meals from the cafeteria. You… just think about it."

As Cui Yue watched Cao Zhongnan leave the room, questions quietly sprouted at the back of his mind: Could it be that Bai Shaonan really liked him? Did the dean want an imbalanced romance between a master and cannon fodder like him?

Qin Feng would be one of those supporting male characters who naively opposed the master's romance, who would sell Cui Yue out to the Fu family just to have Bai Shaonan return to his old ruthless self. Then, at the end, after numerous battles, Qin Feng would realize that Cui Yue really was the master's true love, and in regret of his past actions, would sacrifice himself in a mutually assured destruction with the Fu family, leaving Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan standing alone at the edge of a cliff to watch the last rays of a setting sun…

As it turned out, Cui Yue's headcanon was not much better.

The same night that he was suspected of one-sidedly crushing on Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan—who had gotten to the top of the Bai family for reasons he himself did not know—concluded his business trip three days early and returned to the underworld, discreetly and away from prying ghostly eyes.

He cleverly did not go home and instead dragged his broken body over to disturb Qin Feng, whose nightcapped head was a signal the ghost was

obviously grumpy at the intrusion, though he still let Bai Shaonan in.

Bai Shaonan was covered from head to toe with a bloody stench that could revolt even ghosts, but he nevertheless remained as cheeky as ever. His shirt was stained a dark crimson, and his pants, while marginally better, had also been turned a brownish color. He ran into the living room as if he'd been there many times before and flung off his clothes casually, revealing the entirely stain-free body underneath to show that the blood was not his.

Qin Feng was not surprised to see Bai Shaonan like this. After all, his boss always looked like he'd taken a trip to hell upon returning from a business trip above ground. At the sight of Bai Shaonan stripping right in front of him, Qin Feng rolled his eyes and went to his room to retrieve some clothes to toss to his boss.

"You still like this cartoon after all these years?" Bai Shaonan accepted the loungewear covered in a print of little elephants. He decided in his mind that if ever Qin Feng turned against him, he would expose this childish side of him for all to see. That the top-ranking ghost on the Ghoul Charts, Qin Feng, kept a waist-high giant stuffed Dumbo in his bedroom—Bai Shaonan imagined it'd be fun to say out loud.

"Toss your clothes in the garbage if you don't want them anymore." Qin Feng frowned as he briefly looked over Bai Shaonan's body: the area below the right shoulder was empty, a whole section was missing on the back, and there were three or four broken toes. "Where are your body parts?"

"In the bag. I've brought back what I could," Bai Shaonan answered nonchalantly. "You still got material lying around?"

Qin Feng glared coldly at the crimson-colored backpack lying by the doorway. If possible, he would rather not touch that filthy bag at all, but Bai Shaonan had already invaded his kitchen looking for incense sticks to eat, so he had no choice but to put on some disposable gloves with a *humph* and fish the parts out.

"They're all broken or shattered. Even if it's repaired, it's not going to be the most sturdy thing." Qin Feng quickly checked over the body parts Bai Shaonan had shed. Though, they were less like body parts, and more like prosthetics made out of white jade. Ghosts were spiritual beings and did not possess structures such as these, but clearly Bai Shaonan was an exception.

"Tsk. The list of names the old geezers gave me this time was no small feat—it took a lot out of me. Otherwise I wouldn't have been so injured." Bai Shaonan blew through Qin Feng's fridge like a tornado and swept up half of its incense contents before creeping back to the sofa and lying down.

"I don't have enough yin jade here to remake these. Get Bai Qinghe to help, he would be glad to assist," said Qin Feng.

Bai Shaonan was about to agree, but he suddenly remembered what his housekeeper had said before and, displeased, found himself opening his mouth to refuse. "… Don't go to him."

"You're really planning to go see the old geezer looking like this?" Qin Feng arched his brow.

"No, I don't want him to know about Cui Yue's existence just yet." Bai Shaonan closed his eyes. "Speaking of which, how's the kid doing these days?"

"You mean his grades? The midterm results just came out, and Pupil Cui could possibly have set a record as the first PIGS student to fail all his subjects. He's sitting solidly, and uncontestably, in last place of the PIGS ranking," said Qin Feng without a shred of extraneous emotions. He was well aware of Cui Yue's inscrutable significance in Bai Shaonan's mind, and so kept a close eye on every little move the new ghost made. He even knew that Cui Yue had an affinity for the barbecued pork and roast-duck incense in the cafeteria, and that he would ask for extra color and no fat every time.

"He's… a bit of a prodigy in that regard," Bai Shaonan marveled. He didn't think that Cui Yue would do so poorly in school.

"And as for keeping his existence a secret from Bai Qinghe—that's impossible. Even if you set aside the fact that his unconventional admittance has already drawn the attention of the entire student body, as soon as word of his academic failings comes out, I won't be able to suppress the news even if I want to."

"It's that bad?"

"It certainly is, baby daddy. So you better hurry up and tell Bai Qinghe the news of your bastard son so he can have the joy of being a grandpa."

"What in the hell?"

"Why don't you take a look on the university forum yourself."

"Well, it sounds *scawyy* when you put it that way."

"Heh."

Bai Shaonan swiftly commandeered Qin Feng's computer to find out more. Pointedly ignoring the cheerful desktop wallpaper of an elephant and mouse laughing together, he found out after ten minutes just how rich of an imagination his students possessed.

"Get someone to delete these Qin Feng/Bai Shaonan slash fics tomorrow. Motherfucker. When have I ever cross-dressed to seduce you? When have we ever taken a bubble bath together? And when did we *play* in front of a mirror?" Bai Shaonan might have been sounding off his displeasure, but that didn't stop his hand from clicking on the fanfiction titles.

Qin Feng's eye twitched. What was Bai Shaonan doing looking so closely at them?

"Huh. Scum top, cheap bottom… Bai Shaonan/Qin Feng… this one's not bad. This one stays," said Bai Shaonan.

Qin Feng was not interested in pursuing the insanity of this topic. Just as he was about to retire to his room, Bai Shaonan withdrew his gaze from the monitor and said earnestly, "Still, I don't wish to disturb Father."

"Whatever you say, you're the boss. I'll travel up to the graves in the human realm tomorrow to retrieve that yin jade. But I'm telling you, this is the last batch. If you don't bring back more jade to keep in the graves, you'll have to scurry for Bai Qinghe's help the next time you run into trouble," Qin Feng said without any emotion on his face, but a spark of curiosity flashed across his mind: *Is Bai Shaonan avoiding Bai Qinghe now? Is the sky about to rain crimson?*

"Yeah. No problem," Bai Shaonan answered before turning his attention back to the slash fics. Just now, he caught a glimpse of a Qin Feng/Bai Shaonan/Cui Yue fic. If he took himself out of the mix, it was a little exciting seeing the other two together.

Bai Shaonan completed his mission ahead of schedule but was reluctant to let the old geezers of the Fu family in on his real capability. To that end, he hid out in Qin Feng's home and did not reappear until three days after the deadline had passed, all in the name of nursing his injury. Originally, Fu Zhaoyi was going to dole out punishment accordingly, but when he saw the audacious Dean Bai looking like someone on the verge of death, speaking to him in a voice barely above a whisper, and meeting his gaze with unfocused pupils, it frightened him to think that this recent extra-credit mission really might have been too much. He got the impression that if he didn't ease up on Bai Shaonan, then perhaps the infamous Dean Bai really would keel over then and there.

He thought it was the mission that made Bai Shaonan look like a ghastly ghoul, but little did he know it was the three sleepless days without food or drink reading explicit slash fics nonstop that had led to Bai Shaonan's state.

Wretched as Bai Shaonan was, his students were faring no better. Many fic writers who had risen to the top ranks of the Qin/Bai fandom found their works suddenly deleted. Each of them mourned for all that labor of love and passion reduced to nil in the blink of an eye. However, the writers

in the smaller fandom of Bai/Qin were saved by their relative unpopularity. Furthermore, a reader by the name of white_mane_hero had commented dangerous words such as “torture Qin Feng,” “torture him good,” and “better torture him to death.”

Qin Feng was strangely silent, but judging by Bai Shaonan’s extra-heavy workload that stretched for days on end, with no hopes of obtaining permission to return home until he did overtime every day until twelve noon, it was safe to assume there was some retribution against Dean Bai.

Cui Yue was, of course, completely in the dark about the matter between Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng. With his grades, he had recast his elite professors’ outlook on the world and created shock waves among the fellow classmates in his program, thereby securing an unusual status on the pedestal of the PIGS world.

Seeing the despair on Cui Yue’s face, Cao Zhongnan huddled together with the other students in the program to go plead the case on Cui Yue’s behalf. Their argument was as follows: it can’t be easy to survive among the PIGS as someone chosen personally by Bai Shaonan. They finally managed to convince one professor, who agreed to arrange for a makeup exam. Cui Yue was beside himself. He thanked the other students thrice over, stayed up a few nights poring over books, and finally with the accompaniment of Cao Zhongnan and his other classmates, followed the professor into the human realm to do his special makeup exam.

The next day, a complaint against Cui Yue landed squarely on Bai Shaonan’s desk filed by none other than the goodwilled professor who had conducted Cui Yue’s examination.

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03

Aside from the fact that he used to be a university student, Cui Yue still could not recall any memories from when he was alive. Recently, when chatting with his classmates about strange occurrences, a scene suddenly flashed through his mind. There was a long path that sloped downward, and trees on either side with canopies that almost blocked out the sky. He looked down expressionlessly from a high vantage point as he resisted the gravity that wanted to drag him down.

He had been there when he was alive, Cui Yue realized. But still, he couldn't remember any other details.

The professor had heard something about this before and brought Cui Yue to a hotel in a rural area in hopes that his pupil would perform better in a more familiar environment.

"Now, Mr. Cui, I don't expect you to come up with some groundbreaking haunting. There are thirty rooms here, and if before sunrise, at least one person here experiences an emotion of fear, I will let you pass."

Having said this, the professor floated away into the presidential suite. It was a rare opportunity to come up topside, so he found no reason not to take advantage of the occasion to earn some extra Ghoul Points.

Cui Yue quietly watched the professor's receding figure as a flame ignited in his heart. He told himself that no matter what, he couldn't let the professor's goodwill be in vain.

He spent a good amount of time looking for an appropriate target, and finally decided on a young man from Guangdong. The man spoke fluent Cantonese and stayed by himself in a room at the end of the corridor.

The professor had once said to use objects familiar to the target to scare them. For example, writing Chinese characters all over the room of an Italian might just earn confusion instead of the desired result. Cui Yue decided to do something big. He waited until the man was in a deep slumber before he made his move. Early in the morning of the next day, the first thing the man saw when he woke up was a line of curse spread out across two walls written in a crimson-red New Ming font:

"Eat shit, Leung Feifan."

When Bai Shaonan got to this part and saw the famous quote that had been the inspiration of so many internet memes, he set down the file with a blank expression, and said to the furious professor, "Pupil Cui's makeup exam fully demonstrates the 'creative' element of the Professional Ghosts and Creative Scare Scare People program. He's not too far off the mark."

"The human's taken a photo and posted it online, and you call that not too far off the mark?"

"You gotta admit, there was a trace of fear on the man's face when he saw the red writing on the wall, even if he calmed down after he realized it was only four large words that said 'Eat shit, Leung Feifan.' Still, Pupil Cui did fulfill your request of eliciting 'an emotion of fear.'"

"Now you're just mincing words and distorting facts! The guy was taking selfies at the end, and now even the media is reporting on it. The hotel even planned to keep the writing there to attract more guests!"

"It's true that Pupil Cui's solution is not perfect, but it doesn't seem to me so bad that it warrants a failing grade. It's at least a D+."

"But…"

"If you are still unsatisfied, I have a small suggestion to make. What if Cui Yue was there yesterday not for a makeup exam, but instead as a

student to shadow a professor as you demonstrated how it's done. Likewise, the writing on the wall was simply extracurricular practice. Tomorrow, I will personally administer Cui Yue an official makeup exam. How's that?"

The professor thought for a second. He had rushed to lodge the complaint at the height of emotion, but now that he calmed down, he realized that he was also partly at fault for running off and leaving Cui Yue on his own. Since Bai Shaonan didn't pursue that point and instead gave him a way out, it was an acceptable resolution. He nodded and accepted the offer.

After Qin Feng walked the professor out, Bai Shaonan stared at the file before him and *humph*ed. "Holy hell, what kind of shitty answers are these? This kid should be expelled, he really is the pig of PIGS."

"You're the one who wanted to take him." Qin Feng was not surprised at Bai Shaonan's change of demeanor. After all, Bai Shaonan was famously protective of his own in front of others. Even if it was the fault of his own ghosts, he saved the berating for behind closed doors. In public, he made sure to defend his own to the end, even though in the past, Bai Shaonan was the only ghost that could be considered "of his own."

"As a senior, don't you have any word of advice for your junior?" Bai Shaonan asked.

"I was not a graduate of this school."

As news of the "Eat shit, Leung Feifan" fiasco made its way to the underworld, all at once every ghost was discussing the identity of the culprit with such a waterlogged brain. Slowly, rumors emerged that a student had recently set a new record for the lowest grades ever of the PIGS. Combining the two incidents, even though his name was never explicitly mentioned, it was clear to the entirety of U of U Northern Hell Campus who was responsible for the deeds.

Cui Yue walked into the dean's office under the disdainful eyes of the other ghosts. He looked so much like he wanted to erase his memories and

apply for reincarnation right then and there that Bai Shaonan had a rare moment of mercy.

"I'm the one who brought you here, so whether for official or personal reasons, I can't just leave you on your own," was what Bai Shaonan said.

Meanwhile, Qin Feng snickered silently to himself off in a corner. Official or personal reasons? It was obviously entirely and extremely personal.

Cui Yue lifted his gaze in disbelief. He knew he had been a goner by the look on the professor's face, which was why he had immediately prostrated himself before Cao Zhongnan and the other students and apologized as soon as he returned. Though he might have still harbored the hope that he could one day be proficient enough in his studies to skip class, he had still wasted his classmates' good intentions before that day even arrived.

It didn't matter that the other ghosts looked down on him, but he couldn't bring himself to look directly at Cao Zhongnan, whose eyes never failed to emit kindness at him. When Qin Feng called him to the dean's office, he had been convinced the whole time that Bai Shaonan was going to announce his expulsion to him in person.

"Ahem. No need for such admiration." Bai Shaonan blatantly reinterpreted the nature of Cui Yue's shocked expression into one of gratitude to himself. "Since you don't have class tomorrow, come see me here in the afternoon after two o'clock. I'll take you up to the human realm and give you another opportunity at the makeup exam."

"Y-You're not going to expel me?" Cui Yue's voice was bursting with emotion. The ghost realm was freer than the human realm. Even if he was expelled, it wouldn't take him very long to find another path on which to live. And if worse came to worst, he could apply to be reborn. However, for Cui Yue, a college student both before and after death, even if he failed

every subject in PIGS, even if he was coerced into enrolling, it would be a ruinous black spot upon his ghostly life if he were to be expelled.

"So you're also aware that you might be expelled, little hotpot?" Bai Shaonan leaned his head back, his tone indicating that he was the one who had pulled Cui Yue back from the edge. He waved his hand in a gesture that said no need to thank him, but the angle of his arm was eerie in a most unspeakable way. This new arm Qin Feng got him had reinforced durability, so naturally it also weighed more—he was still getting used to it.

"Don't worry, Dean Bai knows about your skill level. Tomorrow's test won't be too difficult." Qin Feng's eyes could no longer withstand the expressions of the devout worshipper and pope in front of him and, after a few more words of advice to Cui Yue, politely sent the ghost away.

Bai Shaonan waited until Cui Yue was gone before gathering up the courage to voice his complaint. "I haven't finished talking with the little hotpot, yet you hastened to send him away."

"You'll be away tomorrow. Don't you need to hurry up and get all the work done in advance today?" Qin Feng said coolly. "If I remember correctly, you haven't finished going through all the new enrollment forms, right?"

Bai Shaonan took a sip of his goji-berry-and-ash tea, wanting to cry but failing to produce tears. He was certain he was the only pitiful dean in the entire underworld to be tyrannized by his own subordinate to such a degree.

The first thing Cui Yue did after leaving the dean's office was float over to Cao Zhongnan so he could share the good news.

Because of the secret-love-ghoul theory, Cao Zhongnan was never that worried about Cui Yue. In his mind, at worst, Cui Yue would get a closed-door berating, or perhaps an opportune "punishment," which was why Cao Zhongnan wasn't surprised when Cui Yue said that he would be doing

another makeup exam with Bai Shaonan the next day. Rather, he thought, *Oh, just as I suspected.*

Of course, he wasn't as tactless as to say all this out loud in front of Cui Yue, who was under the impression that he'd had a close call.

Cao Zhongnan was about to say a few words of congratulations when he noticed that Cui Yue's eyes were red. He immediately changed directions. "A-Yue, what… happened to you in the dean's office?"

Cui Yue froze. Bai Shaonan had insinuated back in the office that Cui Yue was saved by virtue of executive power, which was no doubt unfair to the other students in his program. However, in the end, he still ignored his conscience by quietly accepting the favor instead of asking Bai Shaonan to kick him out of school.

At the thought of this, he bowed his head in shame and mumbled a few words in order to brush the whole thing under the rug.

Cao Zhongnan was absolutely shocked. The manner in which Cui Yue hesitated evoked a whole sequence of explicit scenes in his mind, and he couldn't help but marvel: their Dean Bai sure knew how to have fun and make good use of his office; it must have been hard on the new ghost Cui Yue though, who was obviously a virgin.

"A-Yue, you… you've worked hard. You should rest early today so you don't make any mistakes at your makeup exam tomorrow," said Cao Zhongnan, finally.

Cui Yue peered at Cao Zhongnan. His roommate's hesitant speech puzzled him, yet there was truth in his words. Cui Yue recalled that, in ancient days, people would clean their bodies well in preparation of setting off to do something big, so he picked up his things and left to take a shower.

Cui Yue was taking a shower as soon as he got back! Cao Zhongnan bounced up as though he'd discovered a new land. His feelings were a little complicated. On one hand, it felt like something had been stolen from him, and on the other, he felt an impatience to share this firsthand gossip with

the rest of the world. He floated around the room several times before the desire to share overrode everything else. His only dilemma was that he didn't want to trample on Cui Yue's reputation for the sake of his hot exclusive. After thorough contemplation, his sight settled on the computer at his desk.

He quietly opened up a Word document, and, manifesting an energy he didn't even have for writing essays, he started his career as a fanfiction writer.

Cui Yue had no idea that a god of the Bai/Cui slash fandom was about to be born, right at his side. In the shower, he analyzed the dynamics of the Bai-Fu war and the fact that Bai Shaonan was trying so hard to save him. He concluded that he was, at the moment, merely a nonessential lackey. If he didn't perform well, Bai Shaonan might just dispose of him without a second thought.

As a Bai lackey going on an outing with the highest-ranking ghost of the Bai family, he necessarily needed to look his best; otherwise, he'd make the head of the household look bad. Even if Bai Shaonan could let it go, his loyal employee Qin Feng wouldn't. Therefore, after getting a good morning's sleep, Cui Yue borrowed a set of formal clothes from Cao Zhongnan and floated eagerly to the dean's office to check in.

Having toiled at his keyboard from the afternoon until nighttime, Cao Zhongnan watched Cui Yue leave with a heavy expression. In his eyes, Cui Yue had simply wrapped himself in delectable packaging before personally delivering the parcel to the door for Bai Shaonan to eat. Cao Zhongnan got a feeling that the clothes would not make their way back to him. At the thought of this, he quietly turned and added the scene into his creative content.

"What are you eating?"

Cui Yue thought that Bai Shaonan would take him back to that same hotel as before so he could fix his mistake, but not only did Bai Shaonan have no such plans, he took Cui Yue to a corner of a human middle school, produced a black thing out of nowhere, and dug in.

"Tea eggs." Bai Shaonan was in a charitable mood, so he spared one egg from the four he had to Cui Yue, keeping the rest for himself.

"When did you buy this?"

"Idiot. Do we need to buy things? I found an unlucky fella yesterday and had him burn it to me."

Cui Yue answered, "Oh," before joining Bai Shaonan in the tea eggs. After they finished eating, it was about 3:30 p.m., and the school bell started ringing.

Bai Shaonan shelved his idle attitude and led Cui Yue to the umbrella stand at the front gate of the school. "First lesson, little hotpot, don't fixate on going big when it comes to scaring people. Sometimes, it's the little things that count."

"What does that have to do with why we're here?" Cui Yue looked like he almost understood, but not quite.

Bai Shaonan tutted. "Did you pay any attention to your Malevolent Spirits 101 class? Didn't the professor teach you that we can attach ourselves to unpossessed objects?" Bai Shaonan said, disappointed in Cui Yue's lack of awareness.

Cui Yue looked left at the drizzle coming down from the sky, then right at the stand full of umbrellas, and finally expressed a look of enlightenment. He asked, "You mean we should attach ourselves to the stand, then shoot the umbrellas out to scare people?"

Bai Shaonan almost slammed his head into the wall. "Can you please. Set your sight. On something. Small." He gritted his teeth and took some effort to suppress his violent urges.

"The… umbrellas?" Cui Yue asked in an uncertain tone.

"What do *you* think? Huh? You wanna bet if you shot all the umbrellas out that you're going to make headlines again tomorrow?" Bai Shaonan said, irritated.

Cui Yue shrank his shoulders reflexively. He'd given the wrong answers as soon as they got here. Would Bai Shaonan denounce him as a useless pawn and dispose of him right here and now?

Bai Shaonan saw the panic flash across Cui Yue's eyes. The thought that he might have scared the student occurred to him as his conscience found itself activating again. It was perhaps too harsh to demand a new ghost with zero experience to simply know everything. He recited three times in his mind: *You're the one who recruited this student, you have to teach him well even if you have to do it while kneeling.* Then he tried again, continuing his tutelage. "I'll give you another chance. See how some of these umbrellas are tainted by human energy, and some are not? What does that tell you?"

When Bai Shaonan had said, "give you another chance," he meant he would give Cui Yue another chance to answer his question.

However, in Cui Yue's ears, "give you another chance" meant give him another chance at staying alive.

In order to keep his life, Cui Yue thought carefully for a long while, and repeatedly encouraged himself in his mind before stating his answer in an impossibly stiff tone. "If they're tainted with human energy, that means they were brought to school this morning, and the ones that aren't have been left here for a long time. The owners have forgotten about their existence, so they've become unpossessed objects, which is the target of our attachment?"

Bai Shaonan wasn't aware of the dramatic battles that went down in Cui Yue's mind, but still noticed the student's overly nervous demeanor. It told him that, at the end of the day, the little hotpot did care very much about his schoolwork. Since the student with the poor grades was willing to

learn, as the dean, he naturally would give his full support. Bai Shaonan nodded in satisfaction. "Correct. For new ghosts like you, little hotpot, a moderate amount of passive strategy is the only method you can use. Active engagement and assault may get you the opposite result."

"Yes," Cui Yue answered stiffly.

"You don't need to be so nervous, it's not like I eat ghosts for dinner." The corner of Bai Shaonan's mouth lifted in a crooked smile.

Cui Yue relaxed. The master Bai himself just said that he would let Cui Yue live. What could be more delightful than this? Nothing.

Cui Yue vowed to focus his energy and do well in school from now on. He would prove with his performance that Master Bai was correct in sparing his life. Cui Yue's body unwittingly stiffened again as he lost himself in thought. He didn't realize that he had already gotten used to this role as a Bai family lackey, but felt not a single shred of objection to this fate.

Many students had already left the school, and soon, more than half of the umbrellas on the stand were already gone. With so many students coming and going, the yang energy at the gate was highly concentrated. On top of which, this was usually sleep time for the ghosts of the underworld, therefore Cui Yue, already uncomfortable, felt his eyelids start to droop and had to purse his lips to keep from yawning.

Bai Shaonan saw all this out of the corners of his eyes and couldn't help but be amused. As a self-proclaimed caring dean, Bai Shaonan couldn't just stand there and watch, so he led Cui Yue back to a relatively dark corner. He couldn't do anything about the sleepiness, but he could at least lessen the impact of yang energy on a new ghost.

And as for what Cui Yue conjured up in his mind to explain this behavior, well that was out of Bai Shaonan's hands.

Another twenty minutes later, just as Cui Yue planned to quickly turn around to release a yawn, Bai Shaonan gently bumped against him, gesturing for him to look at the two male students by the umbrella stand.

The two boys had no idea that they'd been targeted. They looked left at the rain, then right at the unclaimed umbrellas, and discussed the possibility of sharing an umbrella to walk home.

The two students opened a black umbrella and walked out the gate, while Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue seized the chance to join them. Cui Yue figured he would have trouble keeping track of everything if he had to float at their pace and think about scaring them at the same time, so he attached himself to the bottom of the umbrella to have one less thing to think about.

"Did the umbrella get heavier?"

"You're imagining things. How can the umbrella suddenly get heavier?"

A trace of approval flashed across Bai Shaonan's face as he listened to the students' conversation. He hadn't even instructed Cui Yue, and the little hotpot already knew what to do.

Cui Yue didn't notice Bai Shaonan's approval. Hearing the student say that the umbrella was heavier, his first thought was, *Oh no, I must've eaten too much, gotta lose some weight when I get back.*

The boys' conversation quickly moved on from the umbrella to girls. As the two started talking about the ladies who took up their hearts, they didn't think that two ghosts were there to hear everything.

When one of the boys described a certain girl in their school as the most peerless beauty the world had ever seen, Cui Yue belatedly remembered that Bai Shaonan seemed to also have feelings for him. Realizing now that the two ghosts were crammed together under the same umbrella, he suddenly didn't know what to do with himself. His eyes darted around at light speed as he panicked, directing his gaze in Bai Shaonan's direction even when his brain was against it.

Bai Shaonan's reason for being so narcissistic was because he really did have an exquisite appearance. Captioning himself with the first few lines from the poetic ode to Mount Lu, "Written on the Wall at West Forest Temple," he described himself as "gentleman from the front, bad boy from

the side, with different degrees of beauty when viewed from different angles," and gave himself the title of Number One Hottest Dean in the Underworld. Therefore, Qin Feng also mockingly called him Bai Mount Lu.

At this moment, Cui Yue stared unblinkingly at Bai Shaonan's attractive eyes beneath his striking brow, at his tall nose and slightly curved lips, and felt that his no longer beating heart seemed to be starting up again. If the ancient beauty Wei Jie could die from an abundance of admiring looks, then the visual feast of male beauty might just make the current ghost Cui Yue come back to life.

As they went along and Cui Yue continued enjoying the "bad boy" side, Bai Shaonan slowly grew impatient. He plopped himself onto the head of one of the students, and noticing Cui Yue staring with hearts in his eyes, asked, "Are your eyes okay?"

Startled at being discovered, Cui Yue instinctively bounced up in place. Since he'd attached himself to the umbrella, it also jostled a few times.

"What the heck? This umbrella's a little weird—it was moving on its own even without a breeze!"

"Hey, don't scare me."

"It was already weird that it suddenly got heavier, and now…"

"Wait, do you feel like… your head is a little heavy? I can't seem to lift mine…"

Since the seeds of fear had been planted, Bai Shaonan disregarded Cui Yue's unusual behavior and quickly gestured for him to make the last strike. "It's time. You've been to vocal class, right? You know what kind of voice to use?"

Cui Yue had just been through a lot. First it was threats to his life, then he remembered the unrequited love Master Bai had for him, and after that, he was discovered peeking; his whole brain was in a scramble. And now, he was abruptly asked to act when he didn't even know how. At last, after Bai

Shaonan urged him multiple times, he finally decided to wing it by saying something in one boy's ear:

"Pics or it didn't happen. Is the girl really that pretty?"

The two students exchanged a look, asking with their eyes whether that raspy voice just now came from the other's mouth. When they both realized that neither of them had spoken, fear appeared in their eyes at the same time. Then, they both let out high screams akin to the sound girls make at the sight of brand-name bags. The umbrella was tossed carelessly to the side, spinning two whole circles on the ground before coming to a stop.

Bai Shaonan watched the figures as they sprinted away and sighed soundlessly. It started off so well, but what was the little hotpot trying to do with that line at the end? Was he trying to join the discussion?

Did the little hotpot like girls?

A dangerous flash appeared in Bai Shaonan's eyes, and he felt an irritation inside. He thought about it for a while and filed this feeling under the category of "objection to premature romance in children." He made a silent decision to announce a new school rule when he went back to forbid first-year students from forming romantic attachments. Having decided this, he visibly let out a sigh of relief, and finally focused his attention on Cui Yue's recent performance. Since everything that had transpired was leagues better than the line "Eat shit, Leung Feifan," he decided to give Cui Yue a C, as encouragement.

Cui Yue still hadn't appeared. Bai Shaonan floated to the umbrella and saw that the ghostling was crouching at the side of the road rubbing his forehead like a little puppy abandoned by its owner.

"What are you doing, little hotpot?"

Cui Yue lifted his head at the sound, and said pathetically with wetness in his eyes, "I-I hit my head… He threw the umbrella so suddenly that I didn't have time to detach myself. When the umbrella hit the ground, I went along with it."

Bai Shaonan's mouth twitched. This was the first time he'd seen a ghost injured during possession.

The pain successfully distracted Cui Yue from what happened prior. He kept one hand on his temple and used the other to log in to the school's system and was surprised to find that he now had 1.5 Ghoul Points.

"What happened?"

"The Bureau of Malevolent Spirit Affairs gave you 0.5 points for the line of text at the hotel, and just now, they gave another point, so you have 1.5 points in total."

"But I didn't apply for…"

"Who said you have to apply? The Bureau of Malevolent Spirit Affairs is the most secretive department under the judge's court. The ghosts in there come and go without a trace, but if you're scaring people, you can be sure that they'll be there."

"Ah, is that so…"

"Why do you think you haven't been expelled? It's because they gave you the point."

"Huh? But I thought…"

"You thought what? That I vouched for you? Sorry, I don't have the authority to vouch for a student who isn't recognized by the Bureau of Malevolent Spirit Affairs."

Having limited brain capacity, Cui Yue was drawn by the mystique of the bureau, thus briefly forgetting about the feelings Master Bai had for him. He spoke naturally like his usual self, and, accompanied by Bai Shaonan, traveled back to hell, chatting amicably the whole way.

This was seen by more than a few ghosts and ghostly guards along the way. The next day, news of the dean of U of U NHC secretly touring the human realm with his fresh-faced lover boy made its way to the headlines. Not only were there articles but also photos of Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue in happy conversation.

The reporters who snuck the candids didn't forget the powerful figure who worked under Bai Shaonan, and, for the sake of personal safety, they put heavy mosaic filters over Cui Yue's face so that his identity was not revealed to the masses.

The reporters soon directed their attention to the University of the Underworld, but the main campus immediately denied any involvement. The reporters then turned their eyes to the Northern Hell Campus but were scared off by a line on the official website that read "Communications, Public Relations, and Media Contact: Qin Feng."

As number one on the Ghoul Chart, the poker-faced Qin Feng had only to say, "No comment on the dean's personal matters," and no ghost would have the gall to ask another question. Bai Shaonan, meanwhile, had naturally escaped to the Qin residence, disappointing the bunch of media ghouls who waited outside his house.

In response, Qin Feng revealed a calculating smile. Using him as a shield? Sure, but get ready to keep the same work hours.

Once, a reporter had snuck onto campus, and when Qin Feng found out, he punted the ghost straight to Judge Yanluo's court. From then on, all ghosts understood that they could bug Bai Shaonan all they wanted and could even camp outside of Bai Shaonan's home, but they were not to sneak onto campus. Therefore, even with the romantic scandal outside, Cui Yue still lived a peaceful campus life tortured by his PIGS studies but undisturbed by the rest of the world.

The last line of defense for U of U NHC was Qin Feng the Great himself.

Cui Yue initially thought that he would receive looks and pointed fingers from his classmates, but students are always surprising. Rather than conjecture about who Bai Shaonan's male partner was, they instead wondered why "Eat shit, Leung Feifan" was able to earn 0.5 Ghoul Points. Besides, if anyone wanted to know who the male partner was, they need

only open the school forums, where various slash fiction was there to satisfy most students' curiosities.

Delusions were often more gratifying than reality anyway.

After Cao Zhongnan heard about Cui Yue's makeup exam experience, he couldn't help but roll around on his bed in glee. Rainy day? Two ghosts, one umbrella? What was this if not love!

Dean Bai was too much; he couldn't type fast enough!

The rumors circulated for a few days before slowly disappearing from public view. Bai Shaonan was happy only for a brief period before he was rendered silent by a letter brought to him by Qin Feng.

It was no ordinary letter. More precisely, it was a letter intended to threaten and warn.

It would have been fine if the target were Bai Shaonan, since there were few ghosts who could touch him. Not to mention, the old geezers from the Fu family wouldn't stand by to allow their interests any harm. The problem was that the target was not Dean Bai, but his student Cui Yue.

Dearest Dean Bai,

I remember the way you looked at me that day, like the brightest star in the night sky.

I remember your voice when you called to me that day, like the most beautiful string in the world.

I remember those lips when you spoke to me that day, their shape so distinct, it was intoxicating.

The most beautiful things in the world are all in you. Believe me, Cui Yue does not suit you; I will make you realize that you deserve better.

Time will prove everything; I will make you forget Cui Yue. Wait for me, soon he will disappear.

Lovingly,

He

If this "Lovingly He" was serious, then judging by Cui Yue's performance on the makeup exam, the ghostling's offing would be as easy as lifting a finger.

"I'm done reading. Call for Mr. Policeman, I mean, call the ghostly guards here," Bai Shaonan instructed as he rubbed his temples.

"Seriously?"

"Of course. You fancy yourself a detective?"

"I thought you'd want to deal with it yourself."

"We are but commoners; we can't just do whatever we want. We need to cling on tight to the friendly neighborhood ghostly guard uncles, they're the most reliable."

Qin Feng rolled his eyes. These words were not the least bit convincing coming from Bai Shaonan's mouth.

By Qin Feng's request, one such ghostly guard uncle arrived at the school discreetly, without disturbing a single student.

Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan's special status aside, the line in the letter about making Cui Yue disappear was enough to make them treat it seriously. Humans turn into ghosts after death, and ghosts could still go into reincarnation and what not, but when ghosts died, there was nothing after that.

"When was this letter received?" the ghostly guard asked.

"I returned to work at half past eight in the evening and found it in my mailbox. There was nothing there when I left this morning."

"Mr. Qin, can any ghost burn mail to your inbox, or is it only certain ghosts who can do that?"

"As long as they know the address, even humans can burn mail to me."

"And then you opened it and read it before handing it directly to Dean Bai?"

"I read all his mail before I give it to him. And, as for your question of whether it's a direct handoff, since Dean Bai very rarely appears on time, I

only handed the letter to him at ten o'clock tonight."

"Then can I ask why Dean Bai didn't appear until ten o'clock?"

"He sleeps in until nine thirty. You can ask his housekeeper about this. He does it every day."

The ghostly guard finished taking Qin Feng's statement and moved on to Bai Shaonan, asking questions ranging from his recent activities to his social circle. Bai Shaonan patiently answered everything since, to him, this was just another excuse to ditch work.

After the ghostly guard got an idea of what had happened, he diverted the conversation, asking, "Dean Bai, please excuse my bluntness, but do you have any female suitors around you?"

"You think a she-ghost did this?" Bai Shaonan asked him.

"The handwriting doesn't look like a male ghost's. Of course, there are always exceptions," the guard said after a pause.

"I actually think that this ghost must've been to a foreign country. Don't you think the tone here sounds like a translated work? Like someone who's forgotten how to write Chinese, having stayed abroad for so long?" Bai Shaonan peered at Qin Feng, and continued, "Besides, with Qin Feng around, no questionable ghost is able to get near me."

"That's true." The ghostly guard nodded.

"Thank you, Dean Bai, for thinking of me as a guard dog," Qin Feng said coldly.

"So you have to work hard then, little puppy," Bai Shaonan retorted since Qin Feng couldn't touch him while the ghostly guard was there.

Qin Feng gave a flat smile before reminding him, "Dean Bai, you haven't answered the esteemed ghostly guard's question. Hurry up and tell him about your relationship status, or do you need me to answer for you—about how empty your love life has been ever since birth? That the idea that you're every woman's dream ghost is only an illusion, that neither male nor female ghosts have any interest in getting close to you?"

Bai Shaonan never thought it was a problem that he was a lonely bachelor, but coming out of Qin Feng's mouth, it suddenly made him feel disparaged. Even the ghostly guard gave him a look of pity.

"Why are you not answering the question, Dean Bai?" Qin Feng wasn't planning to let him off the hook.

Bai Shaonan glared at Qin Feng. He never should have gone so far as calling the other ghost a little puppy. See, retribution certainly came quick.

Besides, with that scary face of Qin Feng's by his side, who would dare risk their life to get close to him?

The ghostly guard laughed inside at the exchange before saying helpfully, "I now understand Dean Bai's relationship status. The preliminary findings are as follows: what appears to be Dean Bai's fanatic stalker was unhappy with the recent headlines, and so made threats targeting Mr. Cui Yue. By request of the school, we will try our best to investigate this matter, and to provide protection for Mr. Cui Yue without alerting him."

"You must not let Cui Yue notice that something's wrong. His grades are bad enough, if he finds out about this, it'll affect his studies for sure. If it comes to that, he'll become the first pig in the history of U of U to be forcibly asked to drop out," Bai Shaonan stressed.

"Understood. We will make the appropriate arrangements," the guard replied.

"Do you need me to place your ghosts into PIGS as students?" Bai Shaonan asked.

The ghostly guard's face twitched. "The course load in PIGS is so heavy that there's barely any time to breathe, how do you expect my colleagues to pretend to be students and protect Mr. Cui Yue at the same time?"

Qin Feng interrupted, "You mean you are planning to blend in as students? We can arrange for two spots in the UM program."

"UM program?"

"The Underworld Management program. The course load there is relatively light. On one occasion, a student missed class for two whole weeks without any issue." Qin Feng didn't clarify the reason for the student's disappearance was that she snuck off to have fun in the human realm, where she met a Buddhist monk who helped her cross over.

"That sounds doable." The ghostly guard came to an agreement with Qin Feng, and after discussing some details, the guard happily left to begin the arrangements.

"Why do I remember that those pigs of ours don't seem to jibe very well with the UM program?" Bai Shaonan waited until the guard left before asking.

"What does that have to do with me?" Qin Feng returned a gentle and harmless smile at him.

Bai Shaonan blinked. The consequence from earlier reminded him that it was best not to speak at this time. However, his phone chose this moment to start ringing.

"Oh, hey, it's from Father."

Qin Feng backed out of the room before Bai Shaonan even had to signal to him, leaving the odd father-and-son duo room to talk.

As Bai Shaonan requested, Cui Yue was utterly unaware of what had transpired. After attending a lecture about the psychology of human terror, he and Cao Zhongnan went to the cafeteria together. Not long after they started eating, Cao Zhongnan asked him a strange question.

"Oh, right, a-Yue, do you remember where you died?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I just wanted to see when your vacation days are. Wherever you died, your vacations from school will line up with the statutory holidays in that region. For example, someone in the ghostly guard program died in the United States, so his vacation days are US holidays. Sometimes when you

don't see someone, it's not because they're skipping class, it's because they're off on holiday."

"You mean the classes continue while students go off on holiday?" Cui Yue was baffled.

"Why not?" Cao Zhongnan asked. He didn't understand why Cui Yue was making a big deal out of it.

"But if I have Christmas off, won't I miss two days of class?" Cui Yue asked. What kind of arrangement was this? How bizarre.

"It's only a few classes, they can just ask their classmates for the notes. Are you worried you won't be able to catch up? Oh, sorry. I forgot you probably wouldn't be able to." Cao Zhongnan was halfway through his sentence when he remembered that Cui Yue was different. He shook his head, also worried for Cui Yue. "Every university in hell goes by this rule. It's too bad for you."

"Next Saturday is Buddha's birthday. Some places have that as a holiday." Cui Yue scrunched up his face. Since coming to hell, he felt like everything seemed to be going against him.

"Never mind that, you should take the time off first since you won't remember it either way. Why not report to the school that you died in a place where the Buddha's birthday is a holiday? We're going on a field trip to the casino hotel that day, so it doesn't affect the lectures. It's fine if you don't go, it'll be nice to take some time off just to rest in the dorms. If you want, I'll give you a rundown when I come back."

Cui Yue didn't want to give up his vacation days, but as a bottom-of-the-barrel slacker, he also worried what his professor would think of him if he didn't even go on the field trip. After some mental debate, the desire for vacation won over, so he said to Cao Zhongnan, "All right, then… thanks in advance."

The placement of ghostly guards into the school was soon arranged. Qin Feng was so thorough that the UM students didn't even realize that they'd gained two new classmates and thought they were students from another program there to take electives.

"Cui Yue will be on vacation in three days. I heard that he'll be staying on campus," Qin Feng said to the ghostly guards.

Bai Shaonan was standing to the side, pretending he wasn't listening. Qin Feng was so busy watching over him and making sure that he was doing overtime that Bai Shaonan seriously wondered how his secretary had the time to track Cui Yue as well. It also vaguely bothered him that Qin Feng knew the little hotpot's schedule so well when even he didn't know it.

"We will also investigate Mr. Cui Yue's social circle in the next few days."

"Aside from his roommate, Cao Zhongnan, we didn't notice him being particularly close with any other student."

"Understood. We will keep investigating in this direction."

The ghostly guards quickly left to carry out their tasks. It was odd that they had never considered fortifying security for Bai Shaonan. Even Bai Shaonan himself was planning to head out to have Thai food with Bai Qinghe.

"If you want, I can tell the ghostly guard uncles that you need protection as well," Qin Feng offered, seeing that Bai Shaonan looked a little off but not knowing what was bothering him.

"No, I suddenly remembered. Father mentioned that he'll be the guest lecturer for little hotpot's class to take them to the casino hotel on a field trip or something." Bai Shaonan frowned. Before he consciously noticed anything, he'd already felt like it was a bad idea to let Cui Yue and Bai Qinghe meet.

"Cui Yue will be off on the day of the field trip." Qin Feng didn't point out the actual concern on Bai Shaonan's mind.

"That should be fine then." Bai Shaonan's brows unfurled, but his eyelids still jumped, as if predicting that something bad was going to happen.

The day before the field trip, Cui Yue had cold feet at the last minute. He discussed this with Cao Zhongnan, wondering whether he should sacrifice his vacation and go on the field trip anyway, but received hard pushback. Since his friend was so insistent, Cui Yue had to give up the idea. That morning, he tossed and turned in bed and couldn't fall asleep.

Cao Zhongnan didn't know the worry in Cui Yue's mind. In his eyes, keeping the dean's favored ghost in the dorms by himself with his roommate gone for a whole day was bound to get him some new content. By the time Cao Zhongnan came back, he'd have fresh ideas to write down. He couldn't help but be thrilled at the thought.

Cui Yue pondered over it for a whole morning, and finally resolved to change his mind at the last minute yet again. Afraid that Cao Zhongnan would come up with more irrefutable reasons to keep him home, he secretly slipped a pack of tissues into Cao Zhongnan's bag, then attached himself to it and snuck out.

By the time Cao Zhongnan found out, Cui Yue had already arrived at the target location.

The professor had no qualms about it. The best part about being a ghost was that they didn't have to reserve rooms. In other words, they got free boarding. It was just unfortunate for the human guests staying at the hotel.

"A-Yue… if you can attach yourself to an object belonging to a ghost, then why did you do so poorly on the tests?" Cao Zhongnan sighed. Since Cui Yue was already here, he very well couldn't kick him out.

"Is it not possible to attach to a ghost's object?" Cui Yue asked curiously, having just come back from reporting to the professor.

"It's easy to do on something belonging to a human but difficult if it belongs to a ghost." Cao Zhongnan was about to explain the difference between the two when the professor coughed a few times to ask for quiet.

"Students, like I mentioned in the last class, we have the honor of having Doctor Bai Qinghe here on this field trip to guide and instruct us.

"Doctor Bai Qinghe has researched gamblers for many years and has extensive knowledge and experience about how to scare people who care only about gambling. His 'A History of Papers on Gamblers Being Scared' has successfully informed the public on the idea that gamblers are also valuable targets to terrorize. Everyone, please give a warm round of applause to welcome Doctor Bai."

Beside the professor was a male ghost wearing a button-up shirt and white overcoat. His appearance was a little gloomy. Compared to the lively students of PIGS, he seemed much more like what people imagined a malevolent spirit to be.

The students followed the professor's lead and started clapping. Not long after, the rumor quickly spread of a certain five-star hotel and the bizarre clapping sounds in the corner of its lobby. The Bureau of Malevolent Spirit Affairs also designated half a Ghoul Point to all students and professors present on that day.

Cui Yue cocked his head and studied Bai Qinghe with an uncertain look. Upon first glance, he got a bad feeling about this ghost. But the more he looked at the ghost, the more he started feeling an odd sense of familiarity.

Could it be that they had known each other while they were alive?

Cui Yue quickly dismissed the idea. If Bai Qinghe had already become a PhD in the ghost realm, there was no way he'd have anything to do with Cui Yue, who'd been a human until recently.

Just as Cui Yue was about to look away, he saw Bai Qinghe look toward him. A palpable hatred suddenly poured out of the calm and

reflective surface of the doctor's eyes, as though he couldn't wait to tear Cui Yue to pieces with his stare.

Cui Yue froze, but quickly, Bai Qinghe shifted his gaze away, returning to his original gloomy self as he started explaining the important points of the field trip to the class.

The emotionally dense Cui Yue blinked. There was only one possibility he could think of for such animosity: the doctor must have been angry that he'd tagged along at the last minute.

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04

The atmosphere was not much better at the Northern Hell Campus.

The ghostly guard stood watch practically right outside the dorm room, but eons had passed and he still hadn't seen Cui Yue come out. At first, he thought that perhaps the target was a hermit, but when mealtime came and Cui Yue had yet to materialize, he realized something was amiss.

The ghostly guard barged into the room, and as expected, there was no ghost inside. The orderly mess hinted that Cui Yue hadn't been abducted by another ghost and instead had left of his own volition without anyone knowing.

However, his roommate was the only one to exit the room that day. When had Cui Yue managed to escape from their notice?

Cui Yue shouldn't even have been aware of the ghostly guards' existence, so why had he snuck out?

The guard couldn't think of a reason, yet at the same time understood that the most urgent matter at hand was not to seek out an explanation but to report Cui Yue's disappearance to Bai Shaonan.

When he heard the news, Bai Shaonan hopped up at once from his seat. "When did Cui Yue become so capable! Impossible!"

Qin Feng held Bai Shaonan down and took the opportunity to redirect the conversation from "Cui Yue successfully evaded the ghostly guard" to "Where did Cui Yue go?"

"Pupil Cui doesn't know any ghost on the outside, so he will probably remain on campus, unless…"

"I bet it's that rotten Cao B who secretly took him topside!" said Bai Shaonan with a stormy expression, though at the same time he felt considerably more settled after finding a reasonable explanation. "I knew he didn't have the chops or else he wouldn't have to retake the exam."

The ghostly guards knew that they were to blame for the mishap, and one quickly said, "We will leave immediately."

"Hold it. There is the possibility that Cui Yue is still on campus." Bai Shaonan picked up the phone and deftly dialed a familiar number. "Let me ask Father first to see if Cui Yue is there."

Qin Feng and the pair of ghostly guards waited unblinkingly on the side, but the call rang for almost two minutes and Bai Qinghe still hadn't picked up. Finally, Bai Shaonan couldn't stand it anymore and chucked the phone away, ordering in a booming voice, "You two stay here with Qin Feng to search for Cui Yue. I will go topside to take a look."

The ghostly guards were about to say that there was no need to trouble the dean personally, but before their wide-open mouths were able to make a sound, Bai Shaonan had already floated away quick as a streak of lightning.

"Oh well. The other one of the Bai family is there. You guys wouldn't be able to do much even if you went. Bai Shaonan is the only one who can deal with it." Qin Feng clapped the ghostly guards on the shoulders, urging them to hurry and turn the school upside down to make sure that Cui Yue wasn't here.

The class of ghosts at the hotel wasn't aware of the events back on campus. After Bai Qinghe shared his thoughts in a calm and unaffected tone, he indicated for the students to put the concepts into application themselves. This was already part of the professor's plan, so the students split off into groups to check whether they had absorbed Bai Qinghe's lesson.

Of course, Cui Yue wanted to be in a group with Cao Zhongnan. But due to the number of students, it wasn't possible to have groups of two all around; therefore, a female student named Wang Qianyi also joined their group.

Despite her delicate appearance, Wang Qianyi held the highest Ghoul Points among all of the first-year PIGS, making her position within the program akin to that of an honor student. Compared to her, Cao Zhongnan could only step to the side.

"Pupil Cui, do you have any thoughts about the assignment?" Wang Qianyi might not have known Cui Yue's exact score on the exams but had heard of his reputation as the last-place ghost. If they carried out the terrorizing with only her and Cao Zhongnan's capabilities in mind, Cui Yue would no doubt hold them back. A better solution would be to accommodate the lowest common denominator at the start.

Cui Yue couldn't help but glance at Cao Zhongnan. The honor student was asking the *slacker* how to do the assignment? He needed help.

Cao Zhongnan received Cui Yue's signal and said, "Even with Doctor Bai's demonstration, all we know are still armchair tactics. I suggest we skip the professional gamblers and target tourists who visit casinos only on occasion instead. What do you think?"

"Zhongnan has a point. The professor only said that the target has to be inside this hotel but didn't specify that it has to be a gambler. We should hurry and seize this opportunity so the other groups don't get to them first," said Wang Qianyi, with a smile in her eyes.

When she spoke to Cui Yue, she kept him at a distance, politely referring to him as "Pupil Cui," but when she looked at Cao Zhongnan, her eyes were surrendering as water and she so tenderly called him "Zhongnan." Cui Yue blinked. He might be dense, but at the very least, he could tell the difference between the ways Wang Qianyi behaved toward the two of them.

It was the first time in his afterlife that Cui Yue had been blinded by someone else's happiness. At the thought that his roommate would soon graduate from the ranks of bachelorhood, Cui Yue felt a little sullen. It just so happened at this moment that the image of Bai Shaonan's earnest side profile under the umbrella emerged in his mind. Cui Yue felt his face heat up. Perhaps he *didn't* have nothing. After all, he still had the furtive affections of a dean-level boss.

Oh nonono. Cui Yue stuck his tongue out. How could he possibly think of Bai Shaonan at a time like this? Besides, if he and Bai Shaonan were to get together with Qin Feng in the picture, it would be his least favorite angsty romance trope.

As Cui Yue contemplated all this, he didn't realize that having no feelings for Bai Shaonan was even an option.

Cao Zhongnan noticed Cui Yue's sudden awkwardness, and looking around, his inquisitive gaze eventually landed on Wang Qianyi. Was a-Yue interested in this girl?

The gender difference aside, Dean Bai outclasses her many times over in looks. There must be something wrong with a-Yue's eyes, Cao Zhongnan thought.

Wang Qianyi noticed Cao Zhongnan's looks in her direction and secretly cheered to herself. Was Zhongnan starting to notice her?

Three ghosts whose minds were on entirely different wavelengths began to search for their target. But after looking through most of the rooms, they still couldn't find a suitable mark. When they finally passed through the lobby, ready to give up on their original plan, they unexpectedly found two women checking in at the front desk. Looking at the guests' slightly naive countenances, the trio decided on them then and there.

During their conversations with each other, the two women didn't express a whole lot of interest in gambling. And what's more, they not only knocked on their hotel room door prior to entering but, after taking off their shoes, placed them at the bedside instead of at the foot of the bed.

Watching this, the trio of ghosts were so ecstatic they were practically glowing. If these women were superstitious to this extent, they would make the perfect targets.

"A-Yue, hurry and go tell Doctor Bai that we're reserving this room."

Cao Zhongnan said this out of mercy to separate Cui Yue and Wang Qianyi, but in the eyes of his roommate, it naturally became "I want some lovey-dovey time with the honor student. Please go chill somewhere else, my bro."

Before Cui Yue had time to respond, Wang Qianyi already spoke up for the sake of her alone time with Cao Zhongnan. "The room number is 1319. Pupil Cui, you better not let any other ghost take the room from us."

Since the couple teamed up to kick him out, Cui Yue had no choice but to swallow his tears and float away, his receding figure sad and lonely.

As a tasteful and rather particular ghost, Bai Qinghe naturally checked himself into the presidential suite. This was rather unfortunate for the newlyweds staying there on their honeymoon, who kept feeling drafts drifting in and out of their room. In reality, this was the yin energy of the students coming to Doctor Bai to report the rooms and targets they'd chosen.

When Cui Yue came to the suite, the couple was in the middle of an unspeakable activity in the bathroom, and Bai Qinghe was out on the little balcony, politely giving them space. From the moment Cui Yue came into the suite, Bai Qinghe never bothered to look directly at him. Even when speaking, Bai Qinghe stood facing the swimming pool on the ground floor. "Go ahead then, which room did you pick? If the other students already picked it, your group will have to choose again."

"We would like room 1319, if you would please check that other students haven't chosen it." Cui Yue felt a little strange. Bai Qinghe's attitude

said that he didn't want to have anything to do with Cui Yue. Was he really that annoyed by Cui Yue tagging along at the last minute?

"Room 1319… It's unclaimed. All right, I'll note it down." Bai Qinghe checked the list in his hand, then indicated for Cui Yue to take his leave.

"Erm… Doctor Bai…" Cui Yue thought for a moment and decided to be open with the doctor. After all, this was the ghost in control of their practical assignment scores. He was fine with another low score, but he didn't want Cao Zhongnan and Wang Qianyi to be affected because of him. "I understand my tagging along today might have been inconvenient, but I will use this assignment to prove that I really do understand what you shared with us."

Bai Qinghe's gaze finally shifted from the scenery onto Cui Yue, but his tone was full of disdain. "You? The lowest ranking of the PIGS?"

Cui Yue guessed that Bai Qinghe was unhappy with his low grades and his initial decision to not participate. He adjusted his tone so that his voice was dripping with apology. "I was being lazy before, but I will definitely apply myself in the practical assignment. I won't let you down, Doctor Bai."

Bai Qinghe smirked. "Let me down? You've embarrassed Shaonan enough already, yet you're still shameless enough to remain in PIGS. If I were you, I wouldn't even have the self-respect to go into reincarnation. I'd rather blink out of existence altogether."

Shaonan? Where had he heard that name before? Wait. Shao… nan. Cui Yue was absolutely stunned. It was the name of their very own dean. What the hell was wrong with Bai Qinghe that he uttered it with such familiarity?

But hold on. Bai Shaonan. Bai Qinghe. Could it be that they were related? Was Qin Feng not the only powerful figure in the Bai family?

"Doctor Bai, so you're…"

"I'm Shaonan's dad," Bai Qinghe cut him off as his expression darkened. "I can't believe someone as dumb as you has the audacity to keep bothering

Shaonan and the gall to talk back to me. Cui Yue, don't think that I have to be nice to you just because Shaonan's got your back."

"That's not it, Doctor Bai, you've misunderstood…" Cui Yue couldn't exonerate himself even if he tried. Bai Qinghe already had such a terrible impression of him, if he were to tell the truth about Bai Shaonan's crush, it might enrage the other ghost so much he'd rip Cui Yue a new one on the spot.

"There is no misunderstanding." Bai Qinghe cut him off again with a look of unconcealed contempt. "I am not yet at the point to fail you based on personal grudges, but I won't guarantee that if you stay here and continue talking."

Bai Qinghe's words struck Cui Yue right where it hurt. As unfair as he felt the whole thing was, he had no choice but to shut up and leave. When he returned to the thirteenth floor, he didn't dare tell Cao Zhongnan and Wang Qianyi about what had just happened for fear they would think of him as dead weight and kick him out of the group.

In the face of academic scores, even the best of friends could turn against each other.

After all, he had just made a big promise in front of Bai Qinghe. If he didn't hang on tight to the honor student, how could he possibly change Bai Qinghe's impression of him with his own amateur ability alone? Even though Cui Yue didn't say anything, the worry on his face betrayed him to Cao Zhongnan, who sent Wang Qianyi away with an excuse and pulled Cui Yue into the bathroom to ask him what was wrong.

"Be honest, a-Yue. Was it something Doctor Bai said?"

Meeting Cao Zhongnan's inquisitive gaze, Cui Yue hesitated for a moment but firmly decided against bringing up the unhappy conversation. He changed the subject in an attempt to stall. "Nah… I just recently found out that Doctor Bai is the dean's dad."

"What? You *just* found out?" Cao Zhongnan's attention was successfully diverted for all but one second before he quickly snapped back. Coupled with his expansive imagination, he immediately figured out the "truth." *Is Doctor Bai unsatisfied with Bai Shaonan's new wifey?*

Domestic conflict within the wealthy family! Disharmony between the in-law and spouse!

Past rumors about Bai Qinghe and Bai Shaonan's relationship flashed through Cao Zhongnan's mind, and he quickly realized what was happening. He peered at naive little Cui Yue as a sense of calling arose within him. Cui Yue had a long way to go on the path to defeating the evil in-law (who might also be the rival love interest), and so Cao Zhongnan decided it was time to teach his friend some valuable harem survival strategies.

"Don't worry, a-Yue. Don't forget that the most important person has your back." Cao Zhongnan winked at Cui Yue and quickly turned to leave. Wang Qianyi was still outside—he couldn't have her overhear his roommate's firsthand gossip. After all, it was prime material for himself to type up later.

Cui Yue was surprised that Cao Zhongnan let him go so easily, but of course, he wouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth, so he readily dropped the subject.

There was something complicated in Wang Qianyi's gaze as she watched the two of them float out of the bathroom one after the other. She silently wondered to herself if the target of her affection was, in fact, not straight.

The trio's plan for terrorizing the humans was very simple: knock on the door in the middle of the night. First of all, they had to accommodate for Cui Yue's ability. And second of all, just because it was a common tactic didn't mean that it wouldn't be effective. Sometimes the simplest of moves was the one that could stir the greatest fear from deep within a human's heart.

At around two o'clock in the morning, the two women, who had just come back to their hotel room, no longer had the energy to keep partying. One sprawled out on the bed, while the other quietly removed her makeup. Neither had any inclination of talking.

In the dead silence, Wang Qianyi knew the opportunity had come. She gave Cao Zhongnan a look, indicating that it was time to start knocking.

Cao Zhongnan wanted to give Cui Yue a chance to excel, so he gave Cui Yue a look, indicating for him to act.

Oblivious to Wang Qianyi's miserable gaze that followed him, Cui Yue floated up to the door with the resolve to not let the collective down. He started knocking on the door to their previously agreed upon rhythm, carefully regulating his strength to ensure every knock sounded almost the same—not too loud as to immediately draw the women's attention but not so quiet as to be ignored entirely.

Right on cue, the one in the middle of removing her makeup suddenly stilled her hand as she looked at her companion lying on the bed through the mirror's reflection. "Hey, did you… hear something?"

The one on the bed had her eyes closed until now, but at this her ears pricked up and she replied, "You mean that knocking sound?"

The one at the vanity immediately started cursing out her companion, but her voice was weak and shaky. "How can you still act like it's not a big deal? Don't you think something feels off?"

Excitement flashed across Cao Zhongnan's face. They were getting scared! They'd snared one, and the other wouldn't be far behind. Wang Qianyi had the same thought, but the one lying on the bed turned out to be a challenge; even at that moment she was still composed as ever.

"What's there to be scared of? Isn't it just the renovation next door? Don't you remember? The left side of the hotel was closed off when we came back. Just try to ignore it."

“Is your brain working? How can there be renovation still going on at this hour?”

The corner of Cui Yue’s lips twitched reflexively even as he was still diligently knocking away. Renovation noise? What an impressive excuse.

The woman on the bed considered for a moment and said, “The casino here runs twenty-four hours a day nonstop. It’s probably some guy in another room who forgot his access card and got locked out by his sleeping wife.”

The woman at the vanity paused at this and quickly started pondering the explanation. She then calmed little by little and eventually even agreed with her friend’s opinion.

“You’re right.”

“Exactly. You’re scaring yourself.”

Wang Qianyi directed her upset gaze at Cao Zhongnan. What could they do against such a formidable opponent?

Outside the door, Cui Yue ceased his knocking as sadness filled his heart. Had they failed?

His face turned pale. He couldn’t help thinking that his extreme bad luck had dragged his teammates down. However, Wang Qianyi the honor student lived up to her reputation and swiftly started discussing the next plan of terror with Cao Zhongnan.

“We can’t handle the one on the bed. How about we go straight for the one at the vanity…”

“Yes—scare her when she’s all by herself, like when she’s going to the bathroom or something.”

“You’re a male ghost, Zhongnan. Are you trying to be pervy? Watching girls on the toilet?”

“No, no, no, not at all. I’m leaving this opportunity for an honor student like you to show us how it’s done.”

“Oh, stop it.”

Cui Yue didn't join in Wang Qianyi and Cao Zhongnan's discussion. In his eyes, the other two ghosts were merely flirting back and forth, and he naturally wasn't eager to be the third wheel. On the contrary, he chose to remain in the hallway to obtain intel from the other competitors. After all, there were five other groups carrying out their plans of terror on the thirteenth floor alone.

Having just finished chatting with his classmates in room 1305, Cui Yue figured he'd gathered enough intel and floated leisurely back to 1319. As he went along, he felt that something wasn't quite right. What was that rustling noise coming from behind him?

Cui Yue turned around, intending to see which guest it was who walked with such conspicuous stealth. To his surprise, other than his classmates, who occasionally poked their heads out of the doors on either side, there was not a single living person behind him. Yet the rustling noise not only continued but sounded as though it was getting louder and closer.

It was almost as though a clumsy yet invisible creature was dragging itself along the carpeted floor of the hallway.

Why would there be such strange sounds coming from the hallway in these early hours of the morning? Cui Yue's pupils contracted as he froze in place even as his fingers involuntarily tangled together. He thought that, as a ghost himself, there would be nothing that could scare him anymore, but reality had just slapped him on the face.

Rustle... rustle-rustle... Rustle...

The persistent noise continued to echo in the hallway, sounding especially eerie under the influence of the black wallpaper and the intentionally dimmed lights. Cui Yue hesitated for a few seconds but eventually gathered up the courage to say to the empty hallway, "Is there an esteemed elder here? Or maybe, thou art Doctor Bai?"

Rustle-rustle... rustle... rustle-rustle...

No ghost answered Cui Yue's question. The noise didn't stop but rather seemed to speed up. Cui Yue realized that whatever it was, it could only be bad news. His whole body tensed up immediately as he backed away slowly lest his sudden movements disturb the nameless beast before him. Technically, ghosts didn't have sweat glands, but Cui Yue could feel cold sweat coating his palms as well as his forehead and back.

It was then that a *crack* sounded above his head, and the lights in the hallway abruptly went out. He screamed a silent, "OH NO," and dropping all decorum, turned, and bolted straight for room 1319.

"Huh? The lights in the hallway died?"

Cui Yue could hear ghosts sticking their heads out of the rooms to see what was going on. His face was one of horror as he continued without stopping. As he thought, the next second, a terrible scream sounded from behind him, causing him to shudder violently as all his hair stood on end. He didn't dare look back, fearing that if he did, he would see a ghost-eating monster ripping his classmate to shreds in the hallway before turning its glowing eyes to him—the next target.

Since the monster had already struck, Cui Yue decided there was no need to worry about disturbing it anymore. At once, he opened his mouth and shouted all the way back to room 1319, "STUDENTS OF PIGS, DON'T COME OUT TO THE HALLWAY! THERE'S A GHOST-EATING MONSTER OUT HERE AND IT'S ALREADY EATEN ONE OF US!"

Cao Zhongnan and Wang Qianyi had already agreed to make their move in front of the mirror once the woman finished showering, but the sudden cries from Cui Yue surprised them and threw their plan into chaos. Cao Zhongnan reflexively wanted to charge out to look for Cui Yue, but Wang Qianyi held on tightly and wouldn't let him go. The way Cui Yue was screaming, wouldn't Cao Zhongnan just be running into death if he went outside?

"Let go of me, Wang Qianyi!"

“You can’t go, Zhongnan!”

“You’re going to have me stand by and watch my bro die? Are you that cold-blooded?”

Wang Qianyi was about to argue, when Cui Yue flipped straight through the door, and because he didn’t have time to slow down, tumbled right into Cao Zhongnan’s arms.

“Thank goodness, a-Yue! I was so worried.” Cao Zhongnan didn’t mind that Cui Yue had rammed into him and even carefully looked Cui Yue over to make sure that he wasn’t injured.

“Cao B, I was so scared just now…” Still in a state of shock, Cui Yue completely forgot that Wang Qianyi was there and immediately started to tell Cao Zhongnan about what had happened out in the hallway.

Wang Qianyi watched Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan unhappily, trying to deduce whether Cui Yue was into Cao Zhongnan as she was. However, she wouldn’t give up on Zhongnan so easily: if she didn’t fight for it, how could she know if she’d succeed?

“Pupil Cui, can you give us details of the monster’s appearance?” Wang Qianyi conjured up a worried expression like the flip of a switch and interrupted Cui Yue with a note of concern in her voice, a hint to Cao Zhongnan that she also cared very much about Cui Yue.

Cui Yue only then remembered that Wang Qianyi was there. On the surface, he didn’t show much of a reaction other than blinking his eyes, but inside, he let out a string of curse words for embarrassing himself in front of the honor student.

A hint of displeasure flashed across Cao Zhongnan’s eyes. Just a minute ago, Wang Qianyi had been trying her hardest to stop him, so why was she pretending to be concerned only now?

Cui Yue was obediently trying to answer Wang Qianyi’s question, but before he could, a rustling noise sounded from outside their door. The trio of ghosts looked at one another and, without a second thought, shut their

mouths and retreated to the furthest corner of the room lest the monster suddenly change course and decide to come inside. Unfortunately, even though they couldn't see the monster's true form, they were able to make out a dull *humph*, much like the sound a heavy man would make while squeezing through a narrow doorway. The next second, that nightmarish rustling noise sounded from within the room.

It was inside.

They couldn't see its size, but judging by the unusually hefty dragging sound, they could guess that it was no doubt immense. Wang Qianyi made a snap decision. Grabbing Cui Yue with her left hand and Cao Zhongnan with her right, she crossed through the wall and ran away to room 1320.

However, the monster seemed to have locked sights on them. As they left, it gave pursuit. Fortunately, it seemed encumbered by its size, and even though it was able to pass through walls like a ghost, it was not very quick.

The woman lying on the bed in room 1319 rolled over in annoyance as she mumbled, "The soundproofing in this hotel really sucks, and the AC is freezing. Let's not come here again."

"Which floor are the professor and the others on? We can't deal with this on our own; we have to warn him!" Inside room 1320, Wang Qianyi could hear the invisible monster still following them and got goosebumps all over. Compared to the monster, these three little pigs were like dust before a space shuttle. If they wanted to save themselves, they had to find some backup.

"A-Yue, which floor is the professor on? What about Doctor Bai? Which floor is the presidential suite on?" Cao Zhongnan also shouted as he planned to drag his group members into room 1321.

"They're on the top floor!" Cui Yue didn't need Cao Zhongnan to pull him, half his body was already in room 1321, leaving only his head in room 1320 to talk to them. "The top floor… top floor… It's thirty-eight! The

professor is on the thirty-eighth floor! There are only two rooms on that floor, and they've each taken one!"

Wang Qianyi clenched her jaw and dragged the two guys upwards by sheer strength of will. Ghosts mostly moved via floating, but moving at high speed for a ghost was akin to long-distance running for a human; it required training and time. In order to give the students space to get used to campus life, the PIGS schedule pushed the speed floating training to year two. The three of them had clearly not received any formal instruction and were out of breath before they even reached the thirty-eighth floor.

"I-I… can't float any farther… What floor are we on now?" Unexpectedly, the first one to give in was not Cui Yue but Cao Zhongnan.

"Twenty-second—there's sixteen to go." Wang Qianyi's breathing was also a little shaky, but she wasn't panting nearly as hard as Cao Zhongnan.

The yin energy under their feet was intensifying; no doubt the monster was still following them. His face pale, Cui Yue looked around and said, "How about we take the elevator from here."

The two ghosts, who were so used to floating, both blinked at him. Ever since their deaths, they'd never thought about using human-made contraptions. Cui Yue's suggestion was right in their blind spot. Since the monster was still some distance away, the three ghosts made their way to the elevator and rode it up. Their half-transparent figures, when caught on the security camera, managed to give the guards in the surveillance room a good scare.

Arriving at the thirty-eighth floor, all three of them let out a sigh of relief. In their subconscious, they'd put the professor on a pedestal. As long as the professor was there, they were safe.

Wang Qianyi took the initiative and started knocking on the professor's door in a volume only a ghost could hear. Compared to the newly acquainted Bai Qinghe, naturally the familiar professor was more trustworthy. She knocked for a long time, but the professor still didn't come

out. Behind her, Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue looked at each other. They didn't have the time to waste on waiting.

Cao Zhongnan immediately started knocking on Bai Qinghe's door. The evil in-law might look down on the new wifey, but he couldn't very well ignore the plight of other students, right?

Unlike earlier, when Cui Yue had been ordered to float inside on his own, Bai Qinghe quickly stuck his head out the door. He first spotted Cui Yue and expressed a look of disapproval, then slowly asked, "What is it? You're coming to request a room change *now*?"

"No, Doctor Bai…" Wang Qianyi was never one to pay heed to gossip and naturally didn't know about the dispute between Bai Qinghe and Cui Yue. For this reason, she also didn't notice Bai Qinghe's look of disdain but concentrated on relaying to him everything that just happened.

"Monsters like that shouldn't be appearing here." If you asked Bai Qinghe whether he believed it, he would of course say no.

"But I heard it devour a student with my own ears!" Cui Yue said anxiously.

"You heard with your own ears? Did you see it? Why didn't that student's groupmates come up to get me?" Bai Qinghe asked, as if he and Cui Yue were in a debate; whatever Cui Yue said, he had to hit it back.

Just as Bai Qinghe finished his sentence, a wave of yin energy suddenly appeared behind them strong enough to make every ghost turn pale. The elevator door slowly opened even though there was nothing inside. Wang Qianyi had goosebumps again.

The three of them had taken the elevator up, and now the monster had done the same.

"The invisible monster is here!" Wang Qianyi let out a scream. The only one she could rely on now was Bai Qinghe. If it wasn't for her still-intact faculties of reason, she would have loved to hurl Bai Qinghe out like a Poké Ball.

Bai Qinghe turned his body slightly to the side, subtly shielding Wang Qianyi behind him. His elegant fingers traced several talismans in the air, narrowly managing to suppress the monster and preventing it from coming any closer.

And, as for Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue, who were pressed so close together they were practically a single lump—Bai Qinghe let out a *humph* to indicate that he was not interested in protecting them.

Cao Zhongnan was not queerbaiting in front of Bai Qinghe on purpose. His extensive experience with TV dramas made him worry that Bai Qinghe would use the opportunity to get rid of Cui Yue. Loyal as he was, he decided to stick close to his bro, believing that Bai Qinghe wouldn't be so heartless as to abandon him.

But the fact was, Bai Qinghe just so happened to be so heartless.

Cui Yue didn't realize that he'd been abandoned. Still keen to learn, he stared intently at Bai Qinghe to study his every move. As the ghostling watched the doctor carry himself with effortless poise even in front of an unknown monster, Cui Yue couldn't help but marvel. He was indeed a worldly malevolent spirit—so calm and collected no matter how dangerous the situation.

Now under protection, Wang Qianyi slowly calmed down as well. The honor student's point of view was naturally very different from a slacker's. Where Cui Yue saw Bai Qinghe's imposing presence, she noticed his techniques for subdual.

Bai Qinghe had used Taoist cultivator talismans. They were uncommon but just so happened to be especially effective at suppressing this monster. The more Wang Qianyi saw, the deeper her frown. She secretly stole several glances at Bai Qinghe as doubt started to creep into her mind.

The yet-to-appear professor, a monster that suddenly appeared during their practical assignment and chased relentlessly after them but ignored the other PIGS students, the talismans that Bai Qinghe tossed out without a

second of consideration but were able to perfectly suppress the monster… The whole thing was bizarre no matter how she looked at it. Wang Qianyi narrowed her eyes. This time, she not only studied the kinds of talismans Bai Qinghe was drawing but also the details, like the angle of his hands, the expression on his face, and the direction of his approach. Her sharp eyes were unblinking and determined to see through everything.

Since there was something suspect about the help they had found, the only one she could rely on now was herself.

After some observation, Wang Qianyi's eyes suddenly widened as she clamped a hand over her mouth to avoid gasping out loud. If she was correct, then Bai Qinghe's talismans were only directed to the area immediately in front of himself. This meant that the monster, in order to evade the attacks, was slowly retreating in Cao Zhongnan's direction and might even start attacking that way. Without thinking, she rushed past Bai Qinghe to Cao Zhongnan. She didn't have time to consider what she could possibly do. Only one thought filled her mind: save Cao Zhongnan.

"Watch out, Zhongnan!"

Everything happened all at once.

The monster noticed the "opening" Bai Qinghe had left for it and reflexively launched an attack in Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue's direction. A beam of foul-smelling ghostly energy shot straight toward them. With their current abilities, they would be badly injured even if they could hold it off briefly. But right at this moment, Wang Qianyi frantically lunged in front of them, taking the brunt of the blow.

"AHHHH—"

"Wang Qianyi!"

"P-Pupil Wang!"

Shocked cries and distressed screams rang out all at once. Wang Qianyi's twisted visage was reflected in Cui Yue's clear eyes, along with her body slashed through by three razor-sharp claws.

Wang Qianyi's heart had been exposed. It was no longer pumping, but one of the three ethereal souls was stored there. Without her heart, she would be completely gone from the world with no chance even at reincarnation.

"The heart! Hurry and save her heart!" Cao Zhongnan shouted. Unfortunately, he knew only to save the heart but not how to go about doing it.

The monster didn't pay much attention to Wang Qianyi. Just as it was about to shove the heart aside, Cui Yue abandoned all caution, charged, and grabbed her heart with his hands. Cao Zhongnan's pupils contracted at the sight, but he hurriedly rushed to provide cover. The two of them couldn't compare to the monster's power; they couldn't escape injury even with their efforts focused on trying to avoid the invisible claws alone.

"What the hell are you doing, Bai Qinghe?!"

Cao Zhongnan didn't have time to notice what Bai Qinghe was doing at the side. He knew only that if the guy kept holding back, he and Cui Yue would soon be toast.

Cui Yue tried his best to dodge the monster's attacks, and very soon half his arm was gone, but still he clenched his jaw and protected the heart with everything he had. Wang Qianyi had saved him at the cost of her life, so he very well couldn't let her disappear!

His injuries slowed him down, and just as the sharp claws were about to land on him again, a stream of icy cold ghostly energy shot out from behind him, blocking the blow.

"Good job holding on until now, kid. Move aside, it's my turn."

A familiar male voice sounded from behind, and without a second thought, Cui Yue rose up in the air and floated backward, leaving the battle arena open for the other ghost.

"Dean, you're here!"

"Shaonan…"

Two voices containing two very different emotions spoke up at the same time. Bai Shaonan's only response was a cold *humph*. Still standing where he was, he waved his arm, and within half a second, the ghostly energy dissipated from in front of the elevator. In its place was a wave of intense and relentless foul stench, as well as a piece of ordinary-looking white cloth that lay on the ground.

"What are you doing here, Shaonan?" Bai Qinghe's voice was unbelievably gentle, a stark contrast to when he talked to Cui Yue. He swiftly moved forward, his raised hand intending to touch Bai Shaonan's shoulder, but he was stopped coldly halfway.

"Shaonan?"

Bai Shaonan emitted an unusually chilly air of detachment toward Bai Qinghe. "In your eyes, the lives of my students and my teachers are all worth nothing. So I have nothing more to say to you."

Watching all this, Cui Yue was reminded of the conflict he'd witnessed between Bai Shaonan and Fu Zhaoyi, and expertly pulled Cao Zhongnan back.

"Shaonan, how can you speak to your father like this?" Bai Qinghe looked like he was about to pass out from a broken heart. Too bad Bai Shaonan didn't buy it. Off to the side, the corner of Cao Zhongnan's mouth curved slightly upward, as though mocking Bai Qinghe for his show of vulnerability to seek pity.

"I've already notified Judge Yanluo's court; they'll be sending ghosts here very soon. If you have anything to say, save it for them." Bai Shaonan's peripheral vision caught sight of the two students trying to steal away, and he shot a glare at them. Cui Yue immediately froze up and grabbed Cao Zhongnan, obediently cementing both of them in place. Bai Shaonan nodded in satisfaction before continuing to address Bai Qinghe, "Qin Feng and other PIGS professors are on their way, so we won't trouble the good doctor from the University of Hell to look after *our* students."

Once Bai Shaonan finished saying his part, he gestured for Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan to follow him downstairs. Bai Qinghe didn't dare stand in his way, resorting instead to calling after him. This annoyed Bai Shaonan, who kicked at the white cloth on the ground, saying coldly, "Doctor Bai, take a good look at who this is before you make another peep."

Cui Yue couldn't hold back his curiosity and snuck a glance. His face paled. There was no human corpse under the cloth like he'd envisioned, but rather the restrained spirit of his professor. The ghost's contorted face held a tinge of surprise, as if in silent questioning of the perpetrator who had done this to him. He had very clearly been betrayed by a ghost he trusted.

And, in a place filled with first-year PIGS students, who had the capability to do this to a professor?

No wonder Bai Shaonan was furious, even without any direct evidence.

He led Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan to a room uninhabited by human guests, and the first thing he said was, "Let me see her heart."

"Cao B said to protect her, so I grabbed it with my bare hands in the heat of the moment. Will that affect anything?" Cui Yue asked nervously, handing him the heart.

Bai Shaonan released a thin layer of ghostly energy and wrapped it around the organ. "Of course it will, but that's still better than being destroyed."

Cui Yue bowed his head in shame.

Bai Shaonan glanced at the despairing Cui Yue. His lips moved, but in the end, he failed to utter any words of consolation out loud. "Pupil Cao Zhongnan, it looks like you avoided serious injury."

Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan exchanged a look. They had overlooked any injuries they sustained while facing the monster because of their precarious mental states, which were further exacerbated when they learned Bai Qinghe might have been the mastermind behind it all. If it wasn't for

Bai Shaonan mentioning it now, they would have almost forgotten all about the pain.

Compared to Cui Yue, who had lost an arm, Cao Zhongnan was much more fortunate. Aside from a few gashes around his abdomen and some tattered clothing, he hardly looked like he had just gone through a life-and-death battle.

"Yes, Dean Bai, a-Yue's wounds are—"

"Are nothing to worry about; though it's still best if he stays put and doesn't run around. You look fine, Cao B. Why don't you get someone here to burn a glass box down to us, or a container that can be used to store a heart. Otherwise we won't be able to bring her back." Ghosts didn't have to worry about losing too much blood, so except for cases like Wang Qianyi's, where her whole body was gone, it was enough to convalesce in the brimming yin energy of the underworld for a while. The missing hands and feet would grow back on their own.

"All right, I'll go right now," Cao Zhongnan agreed before realizing that the reason Bai Shaonan brought up his lack of serious injuries was only to send him out on an errand. He snuck a glance at Cui Yue, whose face was still deathly pale. Oh, well. Seeing his precious ghostling in such a state of fright, surely Dean Bai would want to personally console him in private.

"If you see any other students along the way, don't tell them about what happened. Tell them to stay put in their rooms and not to come out."

"Got it."

After Cao Zhongnan left, only Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue remained in the room.

"Don't worry, little hotpot." Bai Shaonan let the heart float on its own in midair. "I know a few ghosts in the reincarnation department. It won't be a problem to let her cut the queue."

"Really?"

“She won’t be able to do anything in the underworld in this form, so better to make haste and leave for above ground. This is the least I can do for my students.”

“Th-That’s great.”

“It’s decided then. Now, little hotpot, tell me what happened.”

“Sometime after two o’clock, I was in the hallway…”

“Start with how you got here.”

So, Cui Yue started with how he’d attached himself to the pack of tissues. The ghostling tried his best to be succinct, but after listening to the whole story, Bai Shaonan only asked, “How did you attach yourself to an object belonging to a ghost?”

Cui Yue paused. He thought Bai Shaonan would ask about Bai Qinghe, so he hadn’t expected the other ghost to focus on something so insignificant. “It’s just like with the umbrella. Is there something wrong?” he asked in confusion.

Bai Shaonan didn’t answer. It was very difficult as a ghost to possess an object of the underworld. Even the head of PIGS had to train for at least three years, but the new ghost Cui Yue with his shitty grades had been able to accomplish it.

There was only one ghost in the entire underworld who could do something like this as a newcomer, and that was himself.

But now Cui Yue had become the second special case.

Qin Feng had once called Cui Yue an oddity because he couldn’t find any records of the ghostling before death. At the time, Bai Shaonan had laughed it off. Now, he had to admit that Qin Feng was goddamn right. However, looking at Cui Yue’s blank and naive face, Bai Shaonan couldn’t help but doubt himself. What could such a little hotpot possibly be capable of?

The ghostling even brought mortal danger upon himself.

“Don’t you think you have a problem, little hotpot?” Far from the gentle consolation Cao Zhongnan had imagined, the word “scheming” practically flashed right across Bai Shaonan’s lips. Cui Yue remembered the horror from when he was forced to enroll in school and felt another wave of fear.

“Wh-What problem?”

“Your grades are so bad that you have to retake your exam, yet you’re capable of possession. You’ve easily accomplished something that even the top prodigy of the underworld can’t achieve. Don’t you think this is problematic?”

“Then… What are you planning to do?” Cui Yue asked dumbly, not at all aware that he’d just fallen into Bai Shaonan’s trap.

“Close-quarter surveillance.” Bai Shaonan didn’t know how he even thought of this idea, but as the imagined scenarios played out in his mind, all he could think was how great and fitting it was. And so, before he could think it through, the words were already out of his mouth.

“You’ve lost your spot in the dorms, little hotpot. Starting tomorrow, you’re moving into my house.”

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05

Cui Yue's eyes widened—he couldn't quite understand the foreign concepts coming out of Bai Shaonan's mouth.

Shouldn't they discuss Bai Qinghe's alleged assassination of the professor? How did they suddenly segue into him moving into Bai Shaonan's house?

Bai Shaonan arched his brow as he watched Cui Yue's brain malfunction. The corner of his mouth curved upward for a few seconds, and the shadows that arose in his heart because of Bai Qinghe were also swept clean away.

Cui Yue hadn't had time to think of a reasonable rejection before Bai Shaonan threw down another bomb. "We can't have injured ghosts crammed in the same room together. You stay with me to rest, and I'll find another ghost to take care of Cao B. Yang energy is heavier during the day, so we'll head back tomorrow night."

Drinking in Cui Yue's utterly shell-shocked face with great satisfaction, Bai Shaonan continued, "What, you got a problem with that?"

Cui Yue took a deep breath with the resolve to fight back against the evil bully, but with the slightest cough from Bai Shaonan, his courage immediately evaporated into thin air. He had no choice but to bow his head in submission.

A hint of a smile flashed across Bai Shaonan's eyes, but remembering the tragic mess still awaiting him outside, the twinkle in them quickly

dimmed again.

One professor and two students. It was nothing new for ghosts wandering the human realm to be killed, but to lose three souls at once in an assessment location that had already passed safety inspections was no doubt a major incident that would shake the entire underworld.

Never mind that the professor's soul had been tampered with, which led him to murder two students. The mere fact of the professor's hyperfixation on Cui Yue and the others made Bai Shaonan think that there was something more to it. For example, he had to consider the connection between this incident and the threatening letter.

Furthermore, Bai Qinghe's inaction had forced Bai Shaonan to place Cui Yue close to himself, protecting him in the name of supervision. He was announcing to the underworld that Cui Yue was under his care, and aside from the old grumps from the Fu family who refused to die, who would dare cross Bai Shaonan?

His phone vibrated in his pocket, a sign that Qin Feng and the others were probably here. Bai Shaonan glanced at Wang Qianyi's heart, gesturing for Cui Yue to stay put in the room. Cui-the- guard did not need to be told a second time and promised to complete the mission.

It wasn't until Bai Shaonan left that Cui Yue belatedly realized something important: what the hell—Bai Shaonan was using official resources for his private needs?

Didn't Bai Shaonan have a crush on him? Transferring him into the same room and forcing him to stay in the same place—that was obviously an abuse of power!

Even now, in this situation, the head of the Bai family was still thinking about taking advantage of him! How reprehensible!

Looking at the two large beds in the room, Cui Yue suddenly realized something even more horrifying than his imminent relocation to Bai

Shaonan's house. He at least had his own room in Bai Shaonan's house, but here, he didn't.

Wait. Was Bai Shaonan planning to seal the deal with him tonight?

Cui Yue floated haphazardly around the room, his face flushing, though it wasn't clear whether from anger or embarrassment. Even as he floated around, he never forgot the task he'd been given, which meant he ended up drifting around Wang Qianyi's heart.

Bai Shaonan wasn't aware that, in a certain student's mind, he had become the perverted dean with only sperm on his brain.

The ghostly guards and higher-ups in Judge Yanluo's court were the first to arrive on scene. As the spiritual leader of PIGS, Qin Feng went ahead to help settle the students, which left Bai Shaonan alone to answer questions. Fending off the nonstop barrage on his own, even Bai Shaonan found it hard to hold on. However, he was the one who had prevented the others from disturbing the injured Cui Yue and who had kicked the now MIA Cao Zhongnan out to find a container.

Bai Qinghe had already been politely sent away, which made the dean angry just thinking about it. He was close to bribing the ghostly guards to lock Bai Qinghe away for even longer.

"Dean Bai, do you think this has to do with the letter we got before?" A ghostly guard saw a break in the bombardment on Bai Shaonan and hurriedly seized the chance to take him to a relatively quiet corner for questioning.

"That's for you to investigate. Don't ask me." Bai Shaonan refused to answer.

"Frankly, Dean Bai, you know how complicated these connections of yours are," the ghostly guard said with an apologetic smile. "It's not that we don't want to investigate, but if you could kindly point us in the right direction on occasion, perhaps we won't have to take as many wrong turns, and that would help solve the case faster."

“Save it. Don’t dream of pushing the blame on me.” Bai Shaonan didn’t fall for it. But of course, it was precisely because he could see what a tangled mess of connections lay behind the curtains that he insisted on playing the victim, waiting for the ghostly guards to conduct their investigation.

“Self-preservation certainly is one of Dean Bai’s talents.” Since the guilt trip didn’t work, the guard couldn’t help but rag on him a little.

“Of course. It’s important to know how to protect oneself. ‘No’ means no.” Bai Shaonan accepted the words as praise and retaliated unthinkingly with an anti-sexual assault slogan. Just as the guard was about to leave in a huff, Bai Shaonan switched back to a serious tone. “Don’t let Cui Yue know that he was the mutated professor’s target.”

The ghostly guard’s eyes narrowed. He didn’t even need to say anything, and already Bai Shaonan leaked all on his own that the real target in this incident was Cui Yue. “So it’s true. Then do you think that the resentment in the letter was pointing to this?”

“Not sure. I’m just guessing.” Bai Shaonan waved his hand and gestured for Qin Feng, who was standing not too far away, to come to his side. He warned, “If Cui Yue found out that he was the source of the tragic incident, he’d never be able to bear it. Three souls was enough, I don’t want to see a fourth.”

The corner of the ghostly guard’s eye twitched. As expected, Bai Shaonan was as meticulous as the rumors said. Whenever there was a major incident, he always neatly extracted himself from the equation.

Bai Shaonan paid no heed to the ghostly guard as he went on to issue orders to Qin Feng. “The Judge’s court asked me why a PhD from U of H would come to lead an extracurricular observation of the U of U Northern Hell Campus. Regardless of what other agreements existed in the past between Bai Qinghe and the other professors, from this day on, I’m suspending any sort of academic exchange between us and him.”

Having dealt with the ghostly guards, next up were the higher-ups of Judge Yanluo's court.

The notably uncooperative Bai Shaonan put on a serious face for once for no other reason than the fact that the one sitting across from him was the first secretary of Judge Yanluo himself. Bai Shaonan dared not fool around with the direct representative of the Judge.

"I just spoke to the ghostly guards; they said they haven't seen any evidence to indicate Bai Qinghe's involvement so far. At the latest, they will keep him until the day after tomorrow," said the secretary.

"Let him go then. Either way, I'm prohibiting him from coming to U of U again. If he dares to set foot on campus, I'll let Qin Feng have him," Bai Shaonan replied. He had predicted this result even before the ghostly guards took Bai Qinghe away. He was mad about it, sure, but the dean knew Bai Qinghe would hold evidence to prove his own innocence.

"Oh? Then I certainly am looking forward to your command when you tell me to kick your father out." Since he was made to be a guard dog, Qin Feng didn't care who was in front of them. His priority first and foremost was to rebuke Bai Shaonan.

The white cloth covering the professor was colloquially referred to as a shroud. It looked no different from ordinary cloth, but once it was spread over something, even the most experienced Horse-Faces and Ox-Heads with a hundred years under their belts couldn't see what was below the cloth. Like Cui Yue, they would have only sensed that something transparent was moving beneath.

When the shroud made its initial appearance, it immediately brought the utterly unknown Bai Qinghe before the eyes of former CEO Fu Yanshan. After purchasing the rights to the shroud, the Fu family also became its sole investor. From then on, Bai Qinghe was prohibited from creating more, but the money given by the Fu family was enough for him to continue on to invent a slew of objects that revolutionized the underworld.

There was even a rumor that Judge Yanluo was the one behind the shroud's purchase, and the Fu family had only appeared in his stead.

The Fu family was a major clan of the underworld. In fact, many of the higher-ups in the Judge's court had the surname Fu. As the mutated professor had been draped in one of those very shrouds exclusively produced by the family, that point alone was enough to explain why the Judge's first secretary had made an appearance.

As soon as the matter involved the Fus, even the Judge had to take it seriously.

So, had Bai Qinghe broken the rules and framed the Fu family for the deed, or was there a mole within the Fu clan? If the latter was in fact the case, only the powerful heads of the family had access to the shroud, and besides, what was the point of them doing something like this?

And, if both Bai Qinghe and the Fu family were innocent, then who would possibly have stolen the shroud for such nefarious purposes?

The secretary talked with Bai Shaonan for almost an hour before he was satisfied enough to let the latter go.

"The Fus are in for a bad time," Qin Feng said as soon as the secretary was out of earshot.

"The Fu family have been overreaching. The Judge won't let a convenient pretext like this go to waste." Bai Shaonan yawned.

The corners of Qin Feng's mouth curved up in eager excitement. "He won't stop until the Fus get rid of a few powerful ghosts at the top. The only thing now is who the lucky ghost will be."

"Hey, you're being a little too obvious, reel it in a little."

It was no wonder the ghostly guards were willing to plead with Bai Shaonan. Since the matter at hand involved the Fu family, which made it important enough to alert the Judge, *and* with Bai Shaonan's threatening letter, the scope of investigation was wider than ever. In response to this, Bai Shaonan was naturally sitting to the side, gleefully irrelevant.

The Fu family might be Bai Qinghe's benefactor, but at the end of the day, Bai Shaonan's surname was Bai, not Fu. It was utterly none of his business. After warning Qin Feng to keep things low-key, Bai Shaonan hesitated for a while but eventually spoke up. "Do some digging into the little hotpot when you get back. I want you to get into his history. Leave no stone unturned."

"What's the matter with him?" Qin Feng nodded, then asked.

Bai Shaonan gave Qin Feng a meaningful look. "The little hotpot may be… a prodigy. He might take after me."

Qin Feng didn't respond, using silence to convey the soundless mockery of his boss.

As a top student of the PIGS program, Cao Zhongnan very quickly forced a poor soul at random to leave the warmth of their bed in the middle of the night and burn him a glass container. Blissfully unaware that a crowd of Judge Yanluo's court officials and ghostly guards were waiting for him, he made his way back to Cui Yue's hotel room as soon as he got his hands on the container in order to fish for praise. To his surprise, he was only half a left foot through the door when he saw Cui Yue circling the heart, face flushed and chanting something under his breath.

Cao Zhongnan paused where he was, unable to ascertain on sight what exactly Cui Yue was doing. After some contemplation, he finally deduced that the other ghost was performing some secret ritual in an attempt to revive Wang Qianyi.

In actuality, Cui Yue was cursing out Bai Shaonan as he floated aimlessly about the room, when suddenly he caught sight of Cao Zhongnan watching him from beside the window, looking puzzled but not daring to float inside. Cui Yue was all at once so embarrassed that he wanted to dig a hole, jump inside, and never see the sun again.

"Oh, hey… Back so soon?" Cui Yue was afraid to face Cao Zhongnan for fear of seeing the word "moron" in the other ghost's eyes, though he had enough self-awareness to realize that he wasn't that far from the word.

"Yeah. Better put the heart somewhere safe first. It's probably not good to leave it floating in midair like this." Cao Zhongnan pretended he didn't notice Cui Yue's embarrassment. After all, there was no age limit to cringey behavior. No ghost was impervious to having some dark past.

"Mm-hmm, right." Cui Yue felt a wave of gratitude, but as his eyes landed on the heart and Wang Qianyi's last moment emerged in his mind, his mood fell again.

Cao Zhongnan sensed the change in Cui Yue almost immediately. He stowed the heart away into safekeeping before saying in a lighthearted tone, "A-Yue, what do you think happens after you die?"

"We go to the underworld and drink Mengpo soup, then enter the cycle of reincarnation," Cui Yue answered, not knowing what Cao Zhongnan was getting at.

"Right. So what are we doing now?" Cao Zhongnan gave Cui Yue's head a little pat.

Cui Yue frowned slightly. "We're in school."

"We're studying when we're really supposed to enter reincarnation. A-Yue, this is stolen time for us." Cao Zhongnan paused, before continuing, "So you don't need to feel responsible. All ghosts have to enter reincarnation eventually. Wang Qianyi's stolen time might be shorter than ours, but still she had some. She should be glad."

"You really think so? She was torn to pieces before our very eyes," Cui Yue retorted.

A frosty look flashed through Cao Zhongnan's eyes. The coldness, a look containing a disregard for all lives on earth, was entirely unlike his usual warm and open demeanor. He quickly realized that his feelings were

starting to show and hurried to lower his gaze. "What do *you* think then? That everyone is going to hold hands and go into reincarnation together?"

Cui Yue could hear the anger behind Cao Zhongnan's words, and remembering the happy conversations Cao Zhongnan and Wang Qianyi shared, he suddenly felt guilty. Right, a rare girl who reciprocated Cao Zhongnan's feelings had ended up like this, and now he was being questioned for pulling himself together to console his roommate. Cui Yue figured if he were in Cao Zhongnan's shoes, he definitely wouldn't hesitate to flip out.

"You're right, Cao B. I misjudged you. We should be thankful Pupil Wang can still enter reincarnation. Maybe by the time we graduate, Pupil Wang will come back as an underclassman." Cui Yue ceded first. He didn't want to lose Cao Zhongnan as a friend over this.

Cao Zhongnan acknowledged the surrender and did not dwell further on the topic. "There's no one around, so let's take the heart back to our room. We can try again to scare some of the people inside to sustain some yin energy for nurturing Wang Qianyi's soul."

Cui Yue's face froze, and he stammered, "Cao B… You go on back, I'll… stay here… I have to move out…"

"What?"

After forcing Cui Yue to repeat the words several times over, Cao Zhongnan finally grasped the key point.

Sleeping together in the same room?

Moving out of the dorm to live with Dean Bai?

Despite Cao Zhongnan never believing him, Cui Yue had always insisted on his innocence when it came to Dean Bai. He asserted that they'd never even held hands, never mind kissed or made out… So how did their relationship suddenly progress so quickly to living together?

Even fanfiction authors wouldn't dare to write a story like this. This development had been pushed along by the main characters themselves!

But no, there was another possibility…

"Be honest with me, a-Yue." For the sake of his updates, it took all of one second for Cao Zhongnan to take on the persona of a gossip magazine reporter. "Have you or have you not gone through a secret ghost wedding with Dean Bai?"

They must have. The forced-marriage trope was the only plausible explanation for such rapid developments.

"Fuck you. Where did you even come up with such a horrific idea?" Cui Yue's eyes were wide. He looked scandalized on the surface, but inside he was as sheepish as ever. If even an outsider like Cao B could tell that the dean had a crush on him, would it be appropriate for him to continue as if he couldn't see Bai Shaonan's feelings for him?

Cao Zhongnan, astute as he was, didn't fall for Cui Yue's acting. "A-Yue, your guilt is showing."

In the end, a blushing Cui Yue chased Cao Zhongnan out of the room, but he failed to oust the red flush on his cheeks as quickly as he did his roommate.

He should have known better than to mention to Cao B that he was moving in with Bai Shaonan. The ghost never went easy on the throttle when it came to joking about sex. He'd broken past the limitations of a speedometer and was more like a spaceship hurtling out of the solar system.

Sitting on the bed, Cui Yue couldn't help but think of the forty-eight positions that Cao Zhongnan had just blessed him with knowledge of. He floated up to the shelf just to see condoms in the cupboard that was left ajar. He hid in the bathroom, only for his mind to wander in the direction of mirrors and their *other* uses… At long last, he had no choice but to hang sadly from the ceiling, making friends with the little spiders on the light fixture.

When Bai Shaonan came back, he was greeted with the visual of Cui Yue adhered to the ceiling lights, like a moth to flame. If it wasn't for the

dean's composure, he would think Cui Yue was planning to off himself, moth style.

"Little hotpot, what are you doing all the way up there?" Out of the corner of his eyes, Bai Shaonan glimpsed the container Cao Zhongnan had brought, and nodded in satisfaction. Still, he lamented silently to himself that if birds of a feather flock together, why it was that Cui Yue, having been friends with Cao Zhongnan for some time now, could still produce such abominable test scores? Incidentally, Bai Shaonan assumed Cao Zhongnan must have been spotted by the ghostly guards as soon as he left the room. It was a wonder if they'd be done with the interrogation before the following night.

"N-Nothing." Cui Yue slowly drifted down from the ceiling onto his bed, looking extremely uncomfortable.

"Huh? Why is your face so red, little hotpot? Is it too warm in here? Why didn't you turn on the AC?" Bai Shaonan didn't notice Cui Yue's awkwardness and "thoughtfully" turned on the air conditioning.

But Bai Shaonan's thoughtfulness made Cui Yue's rectum clench reflexively in horror. For the sake of saving his chastity, he swiftly twisted himself into the covers like a tornado, making sure that every strand of hair and every toe was properly secured so not even the slightest breeze could penetrate.

"Your face is flushed, little hotpot. Why are you wrapping yourself up so snugly?"

Just as Bai Shaonan was about to lift up the covers, the mummified Cui Yue bounced straight up from the bed, just short of sticking out his arms like in the movies.

"NO no no! This is fine! I-I'm tired. I'm going to sleep now. Goodnight!"

Bai Shaonan didn't understand why Cui Yue seemed so repelled by him, but regardless, he turned and floated into the bathroom to give Cui Yue

room to calm down.

Not every dean would allow students to act so belligerently. Rumor had it that the dean of the Dead Souls Infrastructure University would coerce his students into greeting him. Bai Shaonan narcissistically thought over his act of silently retreating into the bathroom—what affection he had shown. He practically treated his students like his own children. One would surely be hard-pressed to find even a handful of deans in the underworld as kind as he, and even then, he would certainly be the cream of the crop.

A large mirror was stationed in the center of the bathroom. With a wave of his hand, his handsome and slightly melancholic face appeared in the reflection. Bai Shaonan caressed his chin while admiring the peerless beauty in the mirror as he eagerly took up the role as his own adoring fan.

But just as suddenly as he'd begun, he stopped. He thought he'd guessed the reason behind Cui Yue's unusual behavior. Could it be that the little hotpot's eyesight had improved out of the blue, and he had been struck with a hint of timidity upon realizing how handsome Bai Shaonan was?

The more Bai Shaonan thought about it, the more plausible it sounded. What else could explain Cui Yue's inexplicable change in behavior in the hour Bai Shaonan had been away? If that was the case, he would surely exercise his generosity and forgive the other ghost. After all, his charisma was undeniable to male and female ghosts alike.

After hanging out in the bathroom for a while, Bai Shaonan yawned in boredom and a wave of drowsiness washed over him. At this point, he abandoned his reservations and floated out to sleep.

"So that's it? And then the two of you went to sleep in the same room but didn't do anything?"

Back at U of U Northern Hell Campus, Bai Shaonan had gleefully recounted the events of the night in the dean's office after he had punted Cui Yue off to the dorm to pack. Though his intention was to mock Qin

Feng of being blind, to his surprise, Qin Feng wasn't mad but instead had given him a sympathetic glance prior to such an opaque reply.

"What do you mean by that?" Bai Shaonan was unamused. "I even went number two while I was in there."

This time, there was not only pity in Qin Feng's gaze but disdain as well. "Oh, then you certainly are making good use of the hotel facilities."

"Don't you be passive aggressive with me. What exactly are you trying to say?"

"Nothing. You're overthinking it, number-two dean."

"You wanna bet that I'll deduct your pay?"

"Hm?"

"Um… I was just kidding. Just kidding."

Qin Feng smirked. Of course Cui Yue felt uneasy being shut in a room with the dean, but if he was as nervous as what Bai Shaonan was describing, this was no longer the embarrassment of interacting with an unfamiliar elder but obviously the distress of harboring a secret he didn't want found out. For example, perhaps it was the despair of realizing that he had fallen in love with a narcissist.

Had Cui Yue's heart been moved when Bai Shaonan came to his rescue like a hero saving a damsel in distress?

Since when was Bai Shaonan a hero? Did Cui Yue need his vision checked?

It appeared that the Northern Hell Campus only provided its students with dental and healthcare discounts but no optometric options. Since Cui Yue still relied on the goodwill of Bai Shaonan for his day-to-day life, the ghostling's condition would undoubtedly only worsen under these circumstances. At this rate, he would become like the other students on campus and look up to the dean with admiration. Qin Feng felt nauseous at the mere thought of this possibility. Turned out, he was the only one who could see through the facade to Bai Shaonan's true self.

Side-eyeing Qin Feng's blank expression, Bai Shaonan was also filled with disdain. So what if Qin Feng was ten times more professionally capable? Was that really something to be proud about?

The two of them were entrenched in their own little thoughts, which was why they didn't notice the ghostly guard outside knocking on the door until the sound had become incessant. The two ghosts finally snapped out of it as if waking from a dream and, exchanging a glance, shared the same awkward expression.

"Come on in," Bai Shaonan said, after gently clearing his throat. He put on a front as though he and Qin Feng had just been talking about some important confidential matters and were therefore so focused that they hadn't noticed any outside sounds.

"Dean Bai, Secretary Qin, so sorry to disturb you again." The one who entered was not just any ghost but none other than the direct superior of the two ghostly guards who stood waiting outside Cui Yue's classroom.

"What is it?" Bai Shaonan knew that ghosts like him would never go anywhere without reason. His intuition told him that something was definitely wrong.

"Fu Wanli was murdered in a theater in the human realm. He disintegrated into dust on the spot. The suspect successfully escaped without leaving a single trace of evidence at the scene. Our Phantacide Department raided his home this morning and found a letter underneath the sofa. My colleague at the scene sent me a copy, though I believe it's not the first time you've seen one of these." The ghostly guard produced a copy of the letter from his briefcase and placed it on the desk. The expressions on Bai Shaonan's and Qin Feng's faces subtly shifted as they finished reading it.

Dearest Mr. Fu Wanli,

I remember the way you looked at me that day, like the brightest star in the night sky.

I remember your voice when you called to me that day, like the most beautiful string in the world.

I remember those lips when you spoke to me that day, their shape so distinct, it was intoxicating.

I will freeze your beauty in that eternal moment, and in an underworld-shocking way, you shall stay a legend engraved in the hearts of all ghostkind.

Lovingly,

He

"Wow… How uninspired. Didn't even change the first three lines." Bai Shaonan blinked. Instead of saying something dull, like that the perpetrator was probably the same ghost who threatened Cui Yue, he opted for a more unusual response.

"Thank you so much for your *insightful* opinion, Dean Bai. We wouldn't have noticed otherwise," Qin Feng replied to Bai Shaonan in his usual deprecative style.

"It's because of this that we are now formally proposing to fortify Mr. Cui Yue's security detail," the ghostly guard stated the reason behind his visit, ignoring Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng's back-and-forth.

"It's already been fortified. Starting today, Cui Yue will be moving into Bai Shaonan's home," said Qin Feng. If any ghost would dare to barge into the Bai manor and hurt Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan would no doubt ensure that they would end up with a much more tragic fate than Fu Wanli had.

"Then what about at school? Or on the way to and from school?" the ghostly guard asked.

"Make those arrangements yourselves," said Bai Shaonan. He wasn't being irresponsible, but he couldn't very well chain Cui Yue to his side twenty-four seven. If he was to take Cui Yue along on the missions he was given, the ghostling would surely perish from his own painfully inadequate self-defense before the murderer even got to him.

As for the idea of having Qin Feng stand guard for Cui Yue twenty-four hours a day… well, that would simply be ridiculous. As esteemed as Qin Feng was in the eyes of all the PIGS, he would instantly draw a crowd of college students wherever he went on campus, no matter which corner he occupied. And considering that, wouldn't his involvement create an even bigger opportunity for the murderer to strike?

"All right—we'll make the arrangements. But if we do this, it will be impossible to keep it from Mr. Cui Yue." The subtext: when was Bai Shaonan going to tell Cui Yue the truth?

"I will tell him personally," Bai Shaonan promised without hesitation. His reasoning was simple. Since Cui Yue was already head over heels for him, hearing his life was in danger would naturally be an entirely different experience coming from a hottie he admired instead of a homely, pedestrian ghostly guard. The former would surely be able to soothe Cui Yue's distress.

Fortunately, Qin Feng didn't know what Bai Shaonan was thinking; otherwise, he might not have been able to suppress the irresistible urge to pull out a sword and off his boss.

"Thank you in advance then, Dean Bai." The ghostly guard had been planning to involve Bai Shaonan from the start. After all, the dean and student would develop a rapport no matter what. It could perhaps help with stabilizing Cui Yue's mental state.

"No problem."

"Ah, yes, one more thing. The culprit set their sights on Mr. Cui Yue and Mr. Fu Wanli at the same time, which means the two must share some kind of secret connection unbeknownst to any other ghost. Dare I ask you to divulge some details?" Having heard about the previous case and listened to colleagues complain about Bai Shaonan's airtight mouth, this guard knew that getting him to open up was incredibly difficult. Since the preliminary investigations showed that Cui Yue had no direct connection with the Fu family, he purposefully twisted the truth in hopes of finding a breakthrough.

It was a well-known fact that the son of Bai Qinghe was the opposite of his father and intensely despised ghosts with the surname Fu. He hoped to somehow provoke Bai Shaonan into talking if he drew a connection between Cui Yue and Fu Wanli.

"Don't bullshit me. I personally brought Cui Yue back myself. What connections would he have with those old ghouls who refused to give up their spots and go into reincarnation?!" Bai Shaonan's insult was so broad it included every ghost who was working hard to build up the infrastructure of the underworld.

"Our esteemed dean has always dedicated himself to servicing the Northern Hell Campus, and the only ghosts from the Fu family he has contact with on a regular basis are the six who sit on the school's board of directors. And as for the Pupil Cui—he has stayed on campus ever since enrollment. He doesn't have even a penny to his name, so all of his gadgets, food, and board were financed by the dean himself," Qin Feng explained.

Then he added, "Sorry. Forgot that one of the board just died. I meant the *five* who sit on the board of directors. It seems that not only are the honorable ghostly guards incapable of finding out this information themselves, but they jump to ridiculous conclusions too? You'd be smarter to outright suspect Dean Bai to be the culprit."

Qin Feng said all this in a mild tone, though "you're a moron" was all but written between the lines.

"What's that supposed to mean? Hey, it's one thing for you to talk back to me, but how dare you defame me right in front of Uncle Guard? What if he thinks your logic is sound and arrests me?" Bai Shaonan immediately protested.

Qin Feng smiled in response. "Then it would be the biggest joke since the founding of this school."

Bai Shaonan arched his brow. Indeed, Qin Feng was not to be trifled with.

The atmosphere was getting increasingly uncomfortable for the ghostly guard, but at least he was able to confirm that Cui Yue didn't have a direct connection with the Fu family. He hesitated for a while before finally speaking up, "...I'm not an uncle."

The line was so out of nowhere that Bai Shaonan frowned at him. "What are you talking about?"

The ghostly guard gathered up his courage and said, "I've only been dead for twenty-nine years. I'm younger than you, Dean Bai. Please don't call me uncle."

It took Bai Shaonan a whole second to find his voice again. "...So, Ghostly Guard Junior, is there anything else you need? If not, then you may go."

"How would you like us to cooperate?" Qin Feng interrupted.

Bai Shaonan once said that the more focused Qin Feng was on the matter at hand, the colder he looked on the outside—just like an elegant psycho-killer who didn't allow a single drop of blood to stain his suit. And that was the exact comportment with which Qin Feng spoke to the young ghostly guard just now, which didn't even account for the energy he intentionally released to pressure the other party into spilling information.

At the end of the day, as a youngling, the ghostly guard was lacking in experience. He felt as though there was a blade hanging above his head, ready to slam down at any moment. That is to say, he was all too willing to pour his heart out so he could get some relief. "Mr. Fu Wanli is one of the board members of Northern Hell Campus, while Mr. Cui Yue is a student at the same school. Though it is a bit of a reach, the only connection between them is you, Dean Bai. Aside from Misters Fu Wanli and Cui Yue's backgrounds, we will also be looking into your enemies."

"Ah, but Dean Bai has so many enemies. You're looking into him and not the Fu family?"

"We're investigating them as well. If the culprit at the hotel is the same perpetrator who murdered Mr. Fu Wanli and threatened Mr. Cui Yue, then our preliminary conclusion is that this Mr. or Ms. 'He' fellow must be a ghost with a certain level of power and connection to the Fu family."

"Power? Even if my father didn't lend a hand, the monster he conjured up wouldn't have even been able to kill Cui Yue." Bai Shaonan neglected to recall that his timely arrival was what had ensured that Cui Yue only lost half an arm.

"Mr. Fu Wanli's soul was destroyed with a single strike, so he has no chance at reincarnation. That kind of feat is impossible without a considerable amount of power and age." The ghostly guard accidentally let slip Fu Wanli's cause of death.

"Have you restricted the news of Fu Wanli's murder?" asked Qin Feng.

"The Fu family already knows. We can't suppress such big news even if we tried," the ghostly guard replied.

"That's great. I was worrying whether I'd have to notify the board. Now I don't have to," said Bai Shaonan as though none of it had anything to do with him.

"Since the board is now missing a member, you should meet with them to discuss the next steps," Qin Feng reminded him. Since they'd exhausted the small talk, he spoke up to dismiss the guest.

As soon as the guard left, Bai Shaonan took a sip of his goji ash tea and collapsed onto the desk. "Little hotpot and Fu Wanli…?"

"If I was targeting the two of them, I would choose Fu Wanli too," Qin Feng answered in a low voice.

"Why?" Bai Shaonan pursued, suddenly interested.

A spring breeze of a smile appeared at the corner of Qin Feng's lips, and Bai Shaonan's heart sank. His gut told him that what came next was probably not good. As expected, Qin Feng continued, "Cui Yue rarely goes anywhere by himself. In contrast, Fu Wanli doesn't like to be followed

around all the time but has an unusually fixed schedule. Did you hear what the guard said? He was killed at the theater. Every week he would go watch a film at a specific time, in a specific theater, sitting in a specific seat. It was the ideal opportunity to strike."

"How did you know?" Qin Feng might have been calm as he said all this, but Bai Shaonan listened on with horror.

"Heh heh. As the employee of a boss who constantly wishes the Fu family would self-combust, it's my duty to be prepared." Qin Feng gave this alarming answer in a matter-of-fact voice.

"I didn't tell you to assassinate them!"

"All right then. It's me who wants to kill them." Upon seeing Bai Shaonan's wide-eyed stare, he continued calmly, "I'm just kidding. I have to know their general routine to avoid running into them when I go up to the human realm to look for yin jade for you."

Bai Shaonan stared at Qin Feng for a good while and, after confirming that Qin Feng really was joking, sighed with despair. "Ahhh… Ghostly guards these days are all younger than me."

Qin Feng scoffed and proceeded to give his opinion, "Right, but their IQ has also dropped."

Bai Shaonan gave Qin Feng a look as he started to empathize with Ghostly Guard Junior. He reflexively came to the other ghost's defense. "Not necessarily. At least he didn't suspect that I was the culprit, even though I also want to get rid of those six useless old geezers."

"Your electrocardiogram is on display in the Judge's court. They'd know if your heart rate rises even slightly above normal, never mind if you were to vanquish a long-time rival. Your readings would skyrocket to such an extent that even Judge Yanluo would come running out," Qin Feng said as he sat back down in his seat and continued to work. The conversation with the ghostly guard had wasted so much time. He contemplated whether

it would be possible to lock Bai Shaonan down for some overtime the next morning.

"Hey, we agreed never to bring that up again!" Bai Shaonan immediately said, a trace of embarrassment flashing across his face. No one could stay stoic when their dark history was being dug up.

Back at the dorms, Cao Zhongnan seized the final opportunity before Cui Yue left for Bai Shaonan's house to enthusiastically pass on to him all sorts of harem strategies to curry a husband's favor. After the dangerous situation at the casino last time, he'd already figured out any potential enemies on Cui Yue's behalf—Bai Qinghe and the Fu family. Both of these entities were immense mountains that couldn't be blown away. There was a long way to go if Cui Yue wanted to secure his happily ever after with Bai Shaonan.

However, Cao Zhongnan might have come on a little too strong. He was so preoccupied with teaching Cui Yue the techniques he learned from soap operas that he failed to explain why Cui Yue should follow those tactics in the first place. Therefore, since Cui Yue couldn't fathom why Cao Zhongnan was telling him all this, and furthermore failed several times at interjecting, he silently decided to let the words go in one ear and out the other. In his eyes, the key to his self-preservation at the Bai manor was not to take down Bai Qinghe but to protect himself against the papier-mâché housekeeper and secure his own ass.

The two pigs, whose minds were in wildly different places, managed to keep their conversation going with a back-and-forth that boiled down to, "Okay, and also… plus there's… and then…" and, "Nope, nope, *la la la*, not listening," which lasted until Qin Feng personally came to fetch Cui Yue from the dorm.

Cao Zhongnan's jaw nearly dropped to the floor when he opened the door and saw Qin Feng. If Dean Bai was sending out his right-hand ghost,

Qin Feng the Great, to pick Cui Yue up, it meant that his roommate was practically Bai Shaonan's official wife in the dean's mind. How could that idiot Cui Yue *not* see it?

If he were Cui Yue, Cao Zhongnan thought, he'd already be lying on the dean's bed, having fully stripped himself as a show of sincerity.

Bai Shaonan had originally planned to pick up Cui Yue himself. However, Qin Feng had shut him inside the dean's office and plastered a curse on the door to the tune of "no leaving until the finance report has been read." And so, it was Qin Feng who showed up.

Qin Feng was not so thoughtful as to help carry Cui Yue's luggage for him. And so, the two ghosts drew quite a lot of attention along the way; the taller one was graceful with his long flowing sleeves, while the shorter one looked like he was going camping. Of course, Qin Feng never cared about what other ghosts thought of him, and, dense as he was, Cui Yue didn't notice that he had become a spectacle on the street.

"Pupil Cui, Dean Bai is a little slow on the uptake when it comes to *feelings*. You'll have to forgive him." Qin Feng was the first to speak up. Sure, jabs at Bai Shaonan were an integral part of his daily routine, but he would never do anything to actually hurt the dean. This was also why Bai Shaonan always tolerated his abuses.

If Cui Yue could pry open Bai Shaonan's shell, Qin Feng would certainly not stand in their way. Since Bai Shaonan was so oblivious, Qin Feng targeted his efforts on Cui Yue's end. Sure, Cui Yue had a somewhat dubious past, but no one stood a chance against Qin Feng, who hatched cunning schemes as easily as he breathed.

Besides, even if Cui Yue was a spy, Qin Feng had ways to convince him to cross over to their side.

"Slow on the uptake?" Cui Yue didn't expect Qin Feng to initiate a conversation with him, let alone to open with dirty laundry about Bai Shaonan.

"Slow on the uptake when it comes to *feelings*," Qin Feng corrected him. "For example, he wouldn't know if a ghost had a crush on him even if it was right in front of his eyes."

Cui Yue blinked. He was about to ask what Bai Shaonan's awareness of crushes had to do with him when a light bulb went off in his mind. Did Qin Feng mean to say that Bai Shaonan didn't realize that he himself had a crush on Cui Yue?

Did that mean that his chastity was saved?

That must be it! Now he could continue to play dumb!

Cui Yue positively wore his sudden enlightenment on his sleeve. At the sight of this, Qin Feng couldn't help the joy that rushed through his heart as he switched to a much warmer tone of voice to tell Cui Yue to get in the car.

Once situated in his seat within the vehicle, Cui Yue snuck a few glances at Qin Feng through the rearview mirror. Qin Feng still wore his signature poker face, but Cui Yue somehow glimpsed the shadow of an understanding older brother.

Qin Feng the Great, Cao B's idol, certainly lived up to his reputation. The secretary had noticed Cui Yue's discomfiture when faced with unwanted romantic overtures and offered assistance in the form of a tactful hint, Cui Yue thought gratefully to himself.

Cao Zhongnan once said that all PIGS students admired Qin Feng, and reality had proved that to be true. Even a fresh member of PIGS like Cui Yue had officially become a Qin Feng cult recruit.

After arriving at the door to Bai Shaonan's residence, the cult leader Qin Feng went so far as to exchange phone numbers with his new follower. His intention was for Cui Yue to drop him a line if his life was ever in danger, but Cui Yue understood the act to mean that he could summon his leader to save him whenever his chastity was on the line.

Qin Feng took his leave after Cui Yue successfully sent him a laughing emoji on a messaging app, but not before giving him one last reminder. "Oh, right, the housekeeper had been disposed of. You'll have to do your own chores."

"You mean the papier-mâché doll?"

"That's right."

Cui Yue froze. His penchant for the dramatic stirred in his mind. If Bai Shaonan had dared to rid himself of that undercover housekeeper, was that a sign a big war between the clans was about to break out?

Qin Feng cast a glance at Cui Yue, contemplated the ghostling's seeming ineptitude at everything, and made the assumption he couldn't possibly be expected to cook well. A horrible idea crept into Qin Feng's mind. "Don't just get takeout all day. You can watch some cooking videos when you have time. Bai Shaonan works overtime every day, so when you make food for yourself, just make his portion too. That way he'll have something ready to eat when he comes home in the morning."

And as for the taste… Well, that wasn't Qin Feng's problem. He was extremely pleased with the mental image of Bai Shaonan with his face scrunched up, forcing down the breakfast lovingly prepared by his very own little hotpot.

Abusing one's boss is, after all, an act that is universally justified.

Confusion flashed through Cui Yue's eyes. If Qin Feng knew that Bai Shaonan had feelings for Cui Yue, why would he suggest behavior that would only ingratiate him even more? But as he met Qin Feng's open gaze and heard the ghost's caring tone, Cui Yue was suddenly hit with a thought: Qin Feng wanted him to keep an eye on Bai Shaonan's food!

Qin Feng must have been worried Bai Shaonan would ingest tainted food from outside and fall into the Fu family's death trap, Cui Yue thought. Qin Feng was using Cui Yue to keep the head of the Bai family within his sights. The gears in Cui Yue's brain turned as a sense of destiny rose in his

heart. Not only was this a request from his leader, it was also a show of trust from the head of the Bai family's right-hand ghost. If he performed well, there was a chance he could graduate from his current minion position to an official member of the Bai family force, thus saying goodbye to his cannon-fodder fate forever.

If Cui Yue hadn't remembered his track record of blowing up the kitchen, he would have made the promise then and there that he would absolutely complete the mission.

After Cui Yue put his luggage away, he remembered that he still needed to make breakfast, and so followed Qin Feng's orders by watching cooking videos online. More than an hour and five pages of notes later, he solemnly floated into the kitchen and started to abuse the cooking utensils.

Meanwhile Bai Shaonan, sporting dark circles under his eyes, had finally been released by Qin Feng and was on his way home when he spotted one of Mengpo's ghostlings selling food at an outdoor stall for pocket money. Remembering the exorbitant takeout costs incurred by Cui Yue during his last stay, Bai Shaonan bought some with the resolution to educate the little hotpot on what delicious commoner food was.

As soon as he stepped inside the house, Bai Shaonan caught a strong whiff of something burning. He floated into the kitchen apprehensively, just as Cui Yue heard the noise behind him and turned around. The two ghosts made eye contact and said at the same time:

"I… made cheesy joss-stick pasta—would you like some?"

"I brought back some tofu pudding, want some?"

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06

The nearly identical words out of their mouths also produced identical question marks in each of their minds as looks of inquisition reached their eyes. Some neuron must have misfired somewhere to make the other ghost act in such consideration, they each assumed of the other.

"Ahem." Bai Shaonan was the first to speak up. "You know how to cook, little hotpot?"

"I'm still in the learning phase." Cui Yue gave him a sheepish smile. He saw the other ghost's utter faithlessness in his cooking, and in the spirit of not letting Qin Feng down in case Bai Shaonan was pushed into becoming a permanent consumer of takeout food, he hastily played the sympathy card. "When I was boiling the noodles, I thought you might also be hungry, so I made extra for you. Want to try my noodles?"

Learning phase?

Bai Shaonan thought of Cui Yue's academic progress in PIGS and wanted to immediately retreat. Hearing those innuendo-filled words, it only solidified his resolve to not try any of Cui Yue's noodles. He held up his own package and said, "Let's eat this first. Fresh tofu pudding won't be good once it cools down."

Cui Yue looked at his clumps of pasta, then at the food containers in Bai Shaonan's hand and decisively abandoned the biochemical weapon he had created. However, when he opened the lid, Cui Yue first caught a whiff of a strange smell and then spotted a slice of something that didn't fit his

mental image of a tofu pudding topping. He couldn't help but frown. "Is it savory?"

Utterly unaware that a war of the century was about to break out, Bai Shaonan replied densely, "Yeah, it is. What? You don't like it?"

In the face of a clash of taste buds, Cui Yue forgot all about Qin Feng's words and willingly ignited the flames of war. "Savory? How can any ghost possibly eat this? Someone would have to have a messed-up brain *and* tongue to possibly eat savory tofu pudding. It's *clearly* supposed to be sweet."

Cui Yue might have grumbled this quietly to himself, but Bai Shaonan heard every single word without fail. A vein popped on his forehead, and he tried desperately to suppress the murderous urge, telling himself that unjustified phantacide was illegal and not to go into it with Cui Yue. He succeeded in suppressing his rage, but still he didn't feel all too good about it. Thus, he pretended to mumble nonchalantly, "Yeesh, only ghosts who can barely taste would prefer sweet tofu pudding. The salty kind is obviously the best."

Naturally, Cui Yue heard every word. Not only was Bai Shaonan a savory believer, but he dared to insult Cui Yue's tongue! The guy had no idea how delicious sweet tofu pudding was! The smooth tofu coupled with syrup was the best delicacy in the whole world. What the hell did Bai Shaonan know! No wonder Qin Feng the Great always talked back at him. It would be a disservice not to!

He happily cursed away in his mind, completely forgetting the fact that he drew first blood by insinuating savory enjoyers had mental problems, and being totally unaware, accidentally said all this out loud. Bai Shaonan's expression thoroughly darkened at this. It was enough that he had been insulted, but why had Cui Yue brought Qin Feng into it too? The horror of forced overtime was etched into his bones. If anyone so dared to threaten him by bringing up Qin Feng, he would definitely order them to—to… not bring Qin Feng up again!

“Little hotpot, if you don’t want to eat it, just forget it.” Bai Shaonan tutted several times before eventually succumbing to Qin Feng’s supremacy. Of course he knew that the two ghosts had exchanged phone numbers. Now that Cui Yue had the backing of such an enormous mountain, he dared not do anything to provoke him.

If he did, then it was overtime for him. If not, then no overtime. Driven mad by the overtime, Bai Shaonan forgot that Qin Feng had given out his phone number for the sake of protection. His brain was so addled that he assumed he had seen through Qin Feng’s schemes.

“Of course I won’t eat it,” Cui Yue said resolutely. He would rather eat his biochemical weapon than defect to the savory side.

So, the two ghosts ate together in silence, even as their minds were louder than ever. How noisy was it inside Cui Yue’s head? That could be observed from the twisted expression on his face. But the reason his face was so twisted was half because of his own biochemical weapon and half out of frustration at Bai Shaonan. Even though Qin Feng the Great had given him some advice, he was still a little nervous about living under the same roof as the dean. No, he was no longer worried. What could he possibly be worried about, especially from someone who prefers savory tofu pudding!

Bai Shaonan had a crush on him? Sorry. As a ghost of the sweet tofu pudding party, he couldn’t see it.

So what if he was the head of the household? All are equal in the matters of taste buds. Bai Shaonan better stew in his unrequited love!

When the meal was almost finished, Bai Shaonan brought up the main matter at hand before Cui Yue could go back to his room. “Cui Yue, listen carefully to what I say next.”

Cui Yue was surprised. It took him a beat to realize that Bai Shaonan had referred to him by name instead of as his usual nickname, “little hotpot.” Realizing that Bai Shaonan wanted to talk to him about something serious,

he suddenly panicked. Had Bai Shaonan chosen this moment to confess his feelings? Right after their sweet-versus-savory fight?

He would certainly reject him. But if Bai Shaonan pleaded with him, it wasn't entirely out of the question that he just might consider it. Cui Yue took a deep breath and rehearsed the pronunciation of "I'm sorry, you're a good friend, but..." several times in his mind before saying, "Go ahead."

At the sight of Cui Yue making nervous mental preparations, Bai Shaonan offered a deliberate smile in an effort to soothe the other ghost with his beauty. "I'll be frank then, little hotpot. A few days ago, the school received a letter containing a threat to kill you."

Cui Yue blinked. *Huh? What happened to liking me and wanting to be lovers? No. Wait. What did Bai Shaonan say just now?*!

"There's a ghost who wants to kill me? And you're just telling me now?" Cui Yue knew Bai Shaonan wasn't joking and jolted right up from his chair, his eyeballs practically bulging out of their sockets.

"Because the letter was sent to me. I'm used to receiving prank mail like this, so I didn't pay it any mind at first." Bai Shaonan didn't want Cui Yue to connect the threat to the incident at the hotel and blame himself. Even though there was no concrete proof at the moment, the actual objective behind the hotel case had been to assassinate Cui Yue. He was afraid to tell the whole truth, however, and tried a white lie instead.

"But you're telling me now?" It was impossible for Cui Yue to not be mad. He was the victim here. How could they keep the truth from the victim? Where was he supposed to go to air his grievances if something bad happened?

"That's also why we have no choice but to take it seriously now. Cui Yue, yesterday a member of the school's board of directors was murdered. We found a threatening letter in his home, written the exact same way as the one targeting you." Bai Shaonan saw the doubt on Cui Yue's face, and added, "Every member of the board is an old geezer of a ghost. They're all

at least two hundred years old, postmortem, but the culprit was able to rip him to shreds without leaving a trace of soul behind. That's a formidable one."

"That board member… is connected to me somehow? Is it the one I met before?" Cui Yue was confused. He was a new ghost with no relation to any of the higher-ups. The murderer must have gotten the wrong person.

His first reaction upon hearing that he was entangled in a murder case was to suspect the murderer of getting the wrong target—a uniquely "Cui Yue" conclusion to make.

"Have you seen or heard of the Fu family? They're the largest clan in the underworld. All six members of our school's board of directors came out of the side branches of the Fu family. The one you saw last time is Fu Zhaoyi, but the one who died was Fu Wanli." Bai Shaonan thought Cui Yue would become unnerved and horrified, turning into a roller coaster of emotions, but Cui Yue's face displayed a calmness that said he understood.

Bai Shaonan's eye twitched. This wasn't the reaction he'd expected. What "understanding" had Cui Yue come to exactly?

Cui Yue "understood" immediately when he heard the victim's surname was Fu. It wasn't that the murderer had gotten the target wrong, it was just the start of the bloody conflict between the Bai and Fu families. See, Fu Wanli was one of the martyrs. No, it wasn't just a fight between the two families. There must be internal conflict within the Fu family, and the murderer wanted to kill two birds with one stone, getting rid of Cui Yue as well as the member of the Fu clan standing in his path so he could have the seat of the CEO.

Yes. If Qin Feng could see that Bai Shaonan had a crush on him, then the Fu family ghosts would naturally see it as well—hence the target on his back.

It would be a lie to say that Cui Yue wasn't scared. However, his feelings were much more along the lines of "This is finally it." As a member

of the Bai family, he dared not say he contributed until he'd been targeted by the enemy, though at this point it seemed that he still really hadn't contributed anything.

"I got it." Cui Yue nodded earnestly, indicating that he would strive to keep his little life. He figured that was why the head of the Bai family had come to give him the warning.

Bai Shaonan never thought in a million years that the melodramatic headcanons in Cui Yue's mind could simplify this difficult matter so effectively. He still thought Cui Yue didn't understand anything, but as an educator, he couldn't crush a student's confidence, so he asked, "What exactly did you get?"

"I got everything." For some reason, Cui Yue chose that moment to adopt some cleverness and assumed that Bai Shaonan was hinting at him to not spread word about what he knew. Therefore, he followed orders and gave an answer that didn't actually answer anything.

"I don't think that you got everything." Bai Shaonan sighed. Screw his confidence. Where had Cui Yue gotten this conviction that he wouldn't be killed? Was it his biochemical weapon that he was parading as cuisine? This kind of self-assurance desperately needed to be tamped down. Otherwise, what if the next time something happened, Cui Yue was so sure of his invincibility that he rushed out headfirst?

"Ghostly Guard Junior arranged bodyguards for you. From now on, unless you're in my home, they'll always be near you." Bai Shaonan saw the surprise on Cui Yue's face and continued, "They won't be very conspicuous —they'll probably stay in the shadows."

Something soft stirred in Cui Yue's heart. It would be lying to say that he wasn't moved. He never thought the head of the Bai family would be so good to his subordinates. It was no wonder that Bai the Powerful was, well… powerful, he decided that he would never ever jump off this wagon.

Though, being moved was one thing, so there was something he needed to confirm: "They're going to watch me pee?"

"They'll also pee when you go," Bai Shaonan retorted. "If you don't start taking this seriously, I'll get Qin Feng to come watch you pee."

Cui Yue glared at Bai Shaonan and secretly decided to report this matter to his cult leader, Qin Feng.

Bai Shaonan sorted through the current situation, explaining everything to Cui Yue with simplicity even a moron could understand. Cui Yue listened intently, but as he did, something started to feel off.

"So back then at the casino hotel… I was the actual target?" Cui Yue was not as stupid as everyone thought. He might be a little oblivious, but give him some time and he would always arrive at the point.

When did the little hotpot get smart? Bai Shaonan cursed to himself. Meeting Cui Yue's suddenly overwhelmed gaze, he felt like a cultivator had suddenly seized his heart and was about to squeeze until it burst. Bai Shaonan didn't need to breathe, but in this instant, he felt suffocated and dizzy. It was extremely uncomfortable.

"That's not it," Bai Shaonan heard his own voice say. "The professor was covered in a shroud. It has to do with the Fu family, not you."

"A shroud?"

"A cloth that will make a ghost transparent when covered with it."

"The Fu family?"

"Yeah, they did it." Bai Shaonan was well versed in the art of slandering the Fu family; case in point, he was making up the story on the spot for Cui Yue: "The ghosts in the Fu family have an affinity for internal conflict. The professor… he was a Fu family ghost himself, so he got taken out."

Bai Shaonan thought he was being innovative, that the absurd words only came out because he watched one too many soap operas, but unbeknownst to him, the same dramatic plot points serendipitously took

root in Cui Yue's mind. Now that it was spoken out loud, Cui Yue immediately believed it. "Really?"

That's it?

Dean Bai blinked a few times, then quickly convinced himself Cui Yue must have accepted the tall tale out of blind adoration of him, and his narcissism reached new heights. "That's right. It has nothing to do with you."

Cui Yue lowered his eyes, his brain automatically concocting his own explanations to fill the gaps in Bai Shaonan's lies. Could it be that the professor wanted to prove his own worth to the Fus, so he hunted down Cui Yue, a representative of the Bai family? But wait, that meant he was responsible for what had happened to Wang Qianyi…

Bai Shaonan didn't like this forlorn version of Cui Yue. In his mind, Cui Yue was supposed to be happy-go-lucky, and not only was Cui Yue unlikable in this state, he also brought Bai Shaonan's mood down as well. And so, before Bai Shaonan even knew what was happening, he had already reached his hands toward the little hotpot's cheeks, gently tapping both sides at the same time and forcing the ghostling to look up and make eye contact. "I said it's none of your business, so it's none of your business. Understand? Don't overthink it. Wang Qianyi is already set—she'll be leaving for the human realm in five days. I asked around, and this time she's going to be the only child of a wealthy family. Her days will be a lot happier than hanging around here as a ghoul."

Cui Yue didn't pay attention to what Bai Shaonan said, only noticing that his tilted face was less than half a finger's width from Bai Shaonan's. If their noses weren't in the way, their lips would already be touching at this very moment.

Rather than blushing and feeling nervous, Cui Yue's mental state was much closer to one of fright. His heart was about to jump out of his throat from their too-close proximity.

Was Bai Shaonan going to force a kiss? Should he close his eyes? Wait, no. He should refuse! But hey, only up close did he notice how vivacious Bai Shaonan's lashes were and that his skin was so fair and smooth, like tofu pudding…

Cui Yue's brain was malfunctioning, and because of that, he didn't have time to come up with a rejection. On the other hand, Bai Shaonan didn't notice the unspeakable nature of their proximity but felt rather grumpy because Cui Yue's attention was elsewhere.

"I'm talking to you, little hotpot." Bai Shaonan voiced his displeasure. *The hottest man of the underworld is talking to you, and you're distracted?*

Cui Yue's focus shifted from Bai Shaonan's skin back to his eyes. Turned out, only at this distance could one realize that Bai Shaonan's irises were not just black but *also* contained hints of chestnut. He couldn't help but stare, searching for where the black ended and the chestnut began. Furthermore, and what made Cui Yue envious, was that in parts or as a whole, Bai Shaonan always looked so perfect he almost seemed too good to be a real ghost. He was one of a kind, even when factoring in the human realm.

"Hey, are you listening to me, little hotpot?" Bai Shaonan squeezed Cui Yue's cheeks harder, trying to steal back the ghostling's focus.

Cui Yue's lips were pushed out in a pout until they were almost touching Bai Shaonan's, but he didn't pay any notice. His mind was dead set on finding an imperfection in Bai Shaonan, but after a few tries, he couldn't even find a blackspot or acne. Meanwhile, Bai Shaonan's voice rang incessantly in his ears. Despite coming up empty-handed in his search, Cui Yue had somehow gained an unfathomable courage, which he summarily used to pitch forward and knock his forehead against Bai Shaonan's with a whack.

"I heard. Quit jabbering in my ears," Cui Yue snapped with slight anger before Bai Shaonan could even react.

Having said this, Cui Yue turned with a flourish and left the living room.

"I'm going to sleep."

It wasn't until Cui Yue left that Bai Shaonan came back to himself. He stared, dumbfounded, at the stairs leading up to the second floor as his left hand reflexively moved to touch not his pained forehead but his lips.

The contact was still fresh on his mind. Did the little hotpot… just steal a kiss?

In the human realm, a kiss was an act shared between lovers, as it was in the realm of ghosts. So… the little hotpot liked him?

Though, considering his handsomeness, it was more than reasonable for the little hotpot to develop an infatuation.

A sense of helplessness arose from within him. Bai Shaonan had never before experienced such a passionate confession. In the past, the most he received was mail, so he had no point of reference for comparison. Furthermore, the little hotpot had left so swiftly and with such poise immediately after, like an experienced player. So what should he do? Chase after Cui Yue and accept the little hot pot's feelings? Well, to be quite honest, his attachment to the little hotpot hadn't grown beyond the affection toward a PIGS student he had found and picked up off the street; it wasn't quite at the level of lovers. But the thought of rejecting the ghostling made him realize he also couldn't bear to see Cui Yue's forlorn expression again.

Bai Shaonan slowly withdrew his gaze and determined that he had to take the matter very seriously, out of respect for Cui Yue. It wasn't appropriate to consider this question in his post-overtime fatigued state. Yes, he should rest and recharge first before giving this proper deliberation.

As for right now, he needed to wash the bowls and plates first. Shame on the little hotpot—why hadn't he done the dishes before going back to his room? Bai Shaonan decided to give him a good talking-to in the evening.

It wasn't until Cui Yue was back in his room that he realized a most distressing fact.

Just now when he headbutted Bai Shaonan's forehead, they had accidentally touched their lips together too. That's right—the innocent little virgin boy Cui Yue refused to admit that it was a kiss. He was adamant that the contact had been unintentional.

He was in trouble though. As handsome as Bai Shaonan was, would he think that Cui Yue was taking advantage of him?

Cui Yue swore none of it had been purposeful. It was one hundred percent an accident! A total accident!

He wallowed in his embarrassment within the isolation of his room. He considered going out to explain himself, but on second thought, he was afraid that Bai Shaonan, who had a crush on him, was secretly celebrating. He didn't want to rush outside just to be forced into a relationship. In the end, he attempted to console himself with the thought that Bai Shaonan would be so tired from overtime he probably wouldn't remember anything when he woke up in the evening.

Full of despair, Cui Yue burrowed into bed and forced himself to fall asleep. But the more he tried to empty his mind, the more persistently and clearly Bai Shaonan's stupidly handsome face came to focus in his imagination: the bad-boy smile when he coerced Cui Yue to enroll in school, the intent side profile under the umbrella, the imposing figure in the casino who ripped the monster apart with sheer brute force, and the high definition close-up of the handsome face… The different facets of Bai Shaonan successfully forced Cui Yue to capitulate and open his eyes. He curled himself into a ball under the covers, as if doing so would allow him to disregard the various Bai Shaonans in his mind and the flush that had crept up his cheeks as though he were intoxicated.

Cui Yue lay like that for almost an hour, and still, sleep did not find him. He had no choice but to focus his attention elsewhere. For example, he

could initiate a mental review of his culinary experience while secretly cursing out a certain ghost for eating savory tofu pudding… Suddenly, Cui Yue climbed out from under the covers. Hadn't Bai Shaonan mentioned something about Wang Qianyi?

Yes—Wang Qianyi was going to spend her next life as a rich heiress, or something like that. The news made Cui Yue happy. After that nightmarish experience, he was glad the other ghost was getting a happy ending. Bai Shaonan was so kind to have made all the arrangements in such a short period of time.

However, Cui Yue hadn't shown any appreciation when he received the news; instead he had almost taken it for granted. Was that really right of him?

All the romantic dreaminess from before vanished with nary a trace. Cui Yue realized that not only had he failed to express gratitude to Bai Shaonan, the very ghost who was protecting him, but he had also literally butted heads with the other ghost out of simple annoyance. After taking advantage of Bai Shaonan's goodwill, he'd gone wild on the other ghost's turf. Even the most generous of bosses wouldn't stand for such insolence from his subordinate.

Shit. Would it be best if he snuck off to reincarnate now? Cui Yue was afraid that Bai Shaonan would rip him apart with his bare hands. Then he really would be left with nothing.

No. He had to apologize.

Fearing for his life, Cui Yue paid no attention to the fact that it was daytime. He floated out the door purely on impulse and was met by Bai Shaonan, who had just come out of the bathroom after a shower.

Bai Shaonan enjoyed the feeling of bare skin against bedsheets, so he preferred to sleep in the nude. Though that wasn't to say his predilections came before his manners. It might be a short way from the bathroom to his

bedroom, but he'd still put on a pair of pants or something, even for the quick journey.

Which was to say, he wasn't wearing anything on top.

His lean muscles still steamed from moisture with a few lingering drops of water clinging to his chest leisurely rolling down his abdomen. The scene, a rendition of an Adonis leaving the bath, should have been eye candy to say the least, but instead of savoring the sight, Cui Yue looked positively scandalized. After all, the preexisting notions in his mind dictated that one should always be fully dressed right after a shower.

Bai Shaonan was surprised Cui Yue was still up at this time, but as he met Cui Yue's astonished gaze, he couldn't help but feel pleased. The little hotpot couldn't take his eyes off of him. It was true that hotness made a ghost popular.

Cui Yue only felt the wave of embarrassment when he finally snapped out of it. First, he had touched Bai Shaonan directly on the lips, now he was spacing out at the sight of the other ghost's half-naked body. If this wasn't taking advantage, then what is? Before he ended up known as a pervy ghoul, he decided to salvage his reputation and start anew by adopting the persona of a caring minion. Taking the initiative with a thoughtful tone, he said, "You'll catch a cold if you don't dry off properly."

Bai Shaonan's expression darkened. The little hotpot cared not for how awesome his muscles were, how amazing his physique was, how his posture put runway models to shame but about his risk of catching a cold?

Hm. It was kind of sort of thoughtful. Bai Shaonan considered for a moment and came to the conclusion that the little hotpot was going for the archetype of the considerate boyfriend and attempting to win him over with tender warmth.

"Why don't you help me dry off?" The glee was evident in Bai Shaonan's eyes. He thought narcissistically that, since the little hotpot was interested in him, he wouldn't be stingy about benefits, naturally.

He didn't realize that this wasn't, in fact, a benefit but rather treating Cui Yue like a servant.

Hearing this, a cinematic image appeared in Cui Yue's mind of an underling suspected of betrayal being ordered to step up and light a cigarette for the boss who would easily snap off the underling's head upon the slightest infraction. At this thought, Cui Yue felt he could not possibly refuse the request. He obediently stepped up and took over the towel, channeling his inner bathhouse boy as he carefully dried off Bai Shaonan's upper body.

Bai Shaonan looked down, his eyes following Cui Yue's little hands. The contrast against the black towel made the ghostling's skin look even fairer than usual. Cui Yue's fingers were trembling. Was it out of excitement?

Ghosts obviously had next to no body temperature to speak of, but Cui Yue could almost feel an intense heat emanating from Bai Shaonan. It burned his hands even through the layer of towel. Fortunately, ghosts did not have a beating heart to give away their emotions. As panicked as Cui Yue was, he could lie to himself and pretend that Bai Shaonan didn't notice. It was then that Cui Yue pushed a little too hard, and his finger slipped off the towel, making direct contact with Bai Shaonan's firm abs.

"S-Sorry!"

Cui Yue suddenly went from a secret panic to an outward, whole-body meltdown. He withdrew his hands, dropping the towel to the floor, as crimson burned from his ears all the way to his face. If he didn't remember that he still had to apologize, he would have already run back to his room. Bai Shaonan watched the fluster on Cui Yue's face in amusement. He recalled the faint caress of Cui Yue's finger on his body and the kiss in the living room earlier, and an impulse grew within him.

An impulse to pull the little hotpot into his arms and get all the kisses from him.

Bai Shaonan's eyes deepened and darkened precipitously. As Cui Yue quietly stumbled over his words trying to explain himself, the suggestion in Bai Shaonan's mind took root, becoming a Pandora's box of fatal attraction.

Pull him in. Stop his words with your lips before he can cry out. Reach in with your tongue to explore and lure him in. Make him groan from pleasure. Overpower him and take him in your arms. Allow his thunderstruck and lovestruck eyes only to look upon you.

If Bai Shaonan accepted the little hotpot's love, then Cui Yue belonged to him. So what was the problem with kissing his own ghostmate?

Halfway through his fumbled explanation, Cui Yue caught Bai Shaonan's strange gaze on him from the corner of his eyes. Unfamiliar yet intense, the look made Cui Yue's scalp tingle. He subconsciously took a little step back.

"Dean… Bai?"

Cui Yue's feeble voice called Bai Shaonan's wits back to his mind. He took one glance at the little hotpot, who was still trying to back up, and finally reined in the runaway machinations. However, his slightly husky voice betrayed him as he croaked, "It's nothing."

The little hotpot was so dense and innocent that, to him, "liking someone" was probably limited to the occasional cuddling, kissing, and handholding. However, Bai Shaonan's affection included first base and the entire sumptuous homerun that would follow soon after. If the two of them became lovers, Cui Yue would probably want to break up instantly out of horror.

Bai Shaonan could swear on his handsomeness that if they got together, there was no way he could hold himself back, nor did he want to waste the kind of energy self-control would require.

Ergo, it was better for him to not accept Cui Yue at this time. Fortunately, it looked like Cui Yue wasn't planning on confessing his feelings

anyway. They could play the waiting game and see who would be the first to give in.

Upon hearing Bai Shaonan's hoarse voice and seeing him turn his face away, Cui Yue was sure that the other ghost had caught a cold and didn't want to pass it on to him. "You're already losing your voice. You should hurry back to your room and put on some clothes. Otherwise you really will get sick," Cui Yue said with tenderness in his heart.

Bai Shaonan froze. The innocent little hotpot had no idea what the hoarse voice signified. Then again, it was fortunate that he'd been given this pass, and there was no reason not to take it. "Uh-huh. You hurry and sleep too," Bai Shaonan said as he bent down to pick up the towel.

"Wait, no. I actually came out to tell you that I'm sorry. You did so much for Pupil Wang Qianyi, but I never did thank you properly," Cui Yue said in a hurry after taking in a big breath.

"That's not necessary. She's a student at our school. What little I did for her is no big deal." Bai Shaonan was surprised that this was why Cui Yue had come out here. He silently commended his little hotpot for being such a good kid but at the same time felt a little pang of jealousy that Cui Yue had brought up Wang Qianyi again. "Stop thinking about all this when you should be sleeping. Hurry and go back to your room."

Cui Yue realized that Bai Shaonan wasn't truly angry, and let out a sigh of relief upon realizing he would live for another day. A smile appeared on his face as he gave a little nod before turning back to his room.

It was the first time Bai Shaonan saw Cui Yue smile like this. The timid little smile, coupled with the lingering traces of the earlier flush, was a direct and fatal assault on his heart. He floated in place in the hallway for a long time, staring blankly, before looking down at his pajama pants. In order to make sure he could sleep peacefully and avoid unspeakable dreams, Bai Shaonan had no choice but to turn back to the bathroom.

Cui Yue didn't see Bai Shaonan when he woke up in the evening and so assumed that the other ghost was still sleeping. To keep himself worthy of Qin Feng the Great's trust, he continued to execute his grand plan of trapping Bai Shaonan with food and made an extra portion when he cooked his own dinner.

Learning from his morning experience, Cui Yue didn't dare cook the incense noodles for very long. As a result, instead of forming a shapeless clump, this time they were rather raw.

It won't be tough once I add a little broth, Cui Yue thought, lying to himself. He pulled a jar of chicken bouillon out of the cupboard and set it beside the incense noodles. He had no broth, but MSG was always readily available.

Cui Yue finished eating, cleaned the kitchen, and went to school. Not long after he left, the ever-tardy Bai Shaonan opened his eyes. The first thing he did was sneak into Cui Yue's room. After finding it empty, he hurried downstairs and took a lap around the place, finally finding the bowl of incense noodles, sans soup, next to a very conspicuous jar of chicken bouillon.

The little hotpot truly never gets a break... Bai Shaonan laughed soundlessly. Before, he surely would have dumped the suspected biochemical weapon in the trash. But now… He sighed. Better go wash up and start eating.

It wasn't his fault that the little hotpot was so infatuated that he insisted on making a dinner with love.

Cui Yue floated back to the dorms to look for Cao Zhongnan, humming a pop song along the way. The bodyguards following him heard the whole thing. However, Cui Yue's singing was not merely off-key, it was so different from the original that a ghost would start questioning their own existence. The host of ghostly guards were forced to listen for almost twenty

minutes, and some had already seriously considered the prospect of reincarnation.

They marveled at Cui Yue, thinking he certainly lived up to his role as a student of PIGS—always practicing the art of terrorizing, even on the way to school.

Cui Yue didn't care that Cao Zhongnan was still in a deep entanglement with his bed and insisted on dragging the ghost out to talk about Wang Qianyi. After all, he was convinced that, if it weren't for the tragedy, Wang Qianyi and Cao Zhongnan might have ended up as a couple.

Cao Zhongnan yawned. He thought Cui Yue had burst in to talk about his experience in the Bai manor. To his surprise, Cui Yue didn't speak one word about it and instead jubilantly talked about Wang Qianyi. Hadn't they just met at the casino hotel, and for only a short time, at that? Why was a-Yue acting as if his own sister had found a spouse and was due to marry the day after tomorrow?

"Uh-huh. I got it." Cao Zhongnan interrupted Cui Yue, pointing at a box on a desk. "A ghost brought us iPhones. All the first-year PIGS get one. Do you need a new phone?"

"How come everyone gets one?" Cui Yue was astonished. What amazing benefits these underworld universities had!

"Nah. You know Ming-zai—the short-haired ghost who always sits in the first row? Apparently he's been stuck in this grade since the founding of the school and never made it to year two. But the ghost just so happens to have a ton of descendants, and they send him manor houses and all sorts of expensive things every Double Ninth Festival and Tomb-Sweeping Day. He can't use it all, so he rents them out. He rakes in so much money he doesn't know what to do with it, so he brings some to butter up the other students." Cui Yue's jaw was practically on the floor. Cao Zhongnan laughed and continued, "That's how it is with ghosts who have progeny. And guess who else owns a six-story building? Your dear roommate, yours truly."

"So you're rich too?"

"Oh, no, a six story is nothing. To be honest, thirty of them only qualify you as middle class. Note that it's thirty properties, not thirty floors. I'm just a pauper myself."

Actual pauper Cui Yue gave Cao Zhongnan a reproachful look, his eyes full of silent condemnation.

"Frankly, the real ones with descendants get multiple iPhones every year. But iPhones really aren't worth much to ghosts like us. No ghost would even buy one off you. Ghosts like Ming-zai aren't that rare. I only accepted one for you since I figured you've never used an iPhone before."

Cui Yue continued to give Cao Zhongnan the same look. That's right. He *was* a pauper who couldn't even afford an iPhone.

"But that phone of yours, now *that's* an actual luxury hell brand. That thing wouldn't come cheap. No way a normal ghost family could afford that," Cao Zhongnan said meaningfully as he gave Cui Yue a look.

Cui Yue blushed. The bursary he had applied for was still waiting to be approved. Everything he ate, lived on, and used was all sponsored by Bai Shaonan. He couldn't help but feel embarrassed at this fact.

Seeing the blush on Cui Yue's face, Cao Zhongnan couldn't help but tease, "What? What happened in the dean's house?"

Cui Yue recalled the string of events at the Bai manor. He obviously couldn't speak of the Fu-Bai feud, nor the fact that he was a Bai family ghost. After reviewing his options, he was left with two topics: Wang Qianyi's reincarnation and Bai Shaonan's savory tofu pudding.

He'd already told Cao Zhongnan about Wang Qianyi, so Cui Yue said in a huff, "Did you know that he prefers savory tofu pudding! There's got to be something wrong with his brain!"

Turned out, no matter how much gratitude Cui Yue felt for Bai Shaonan, when it came to a battle of taste buds, he didn't care who or how important his opponent was.

Cao Zhongnan rubbed his chin in thought. A-Yue was obviously slow on the uptake when it came to feelings, so Dean Bai must have chosen to use a more aggressive strategy to leave a strong impression in a-Yue's mind —what a cunning trap.

However, he couldn't write this into his fanfic. He didn't want a sweet-versus-savory war starting in the comments under the chapter. Right, he could change it to ice cream. Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue fought over ice cream, then got it all over their clothes. He was thrilled just thinking about it.

The two ghosts hung out for a while in the dorm, their minds in entirely different places, then headed to class.

In order to allay the trauma of the casino hotel incident, the considerate professor had personally planned a new emotional trauma for them. This way, the piglets would have no mental bandwidth to think about what was in the past.

"The content of today's class is very important. I believe everyone will be able to enjoy the experience."

Each and every one of the students reacted at those words. The last time they heard something like this, they were told to transcribe the "Orchid Pavilion Preface" thirty times in the span of three hours, apparently for an in-depth understanding of calligraphy. Their hands almost fell off after.

"Supernatural photos are a method of terrorizing targets using images. But what makes a good supernatural photo? There are two main points. Now listen carefully: One, the photo shouldn't be too clear, or you'll just look like a random passerby who accidentally got into the shot. And two, the ambience must make humans doubt your very existence. That is the scariest thing of all."

The professor placed a box on the table and continued, "There's no point in my telling you more than you would be able to process. We will practice our foundational skills first. Come along—every ghost gets one

container of powder. To appear otherworldly in photos, not only do you need to make yourself transparent, sometimes you also have to make use of props."

Cui Yue accepted the little pink container passed to him by the student in front. It was still sealed. On it was the promotional writing "No. 1 Best-Selling Powder Foundation in Hell for 40 Years, Bright and Blemish-Free Skin Outdazzle Them All."

Cui Yue suddenly had a bad feeling about this.

"Our female classmates may be more familiar with this product. That's right, these are foundation powders. Put it on your face, and it'll increase your transparency. This way you don't have to turn yourself translucent. A tool for the lazy, if you will. Even experienced ghosts used to scaring people with supernatural photographs will still keep some powders on them just in case. Sometimes, to enhance our eeriness, we'll also make our eyes bigger, or even put on some lipstick."

The professor glanced at Cui Yue as he spoke. "Complete newbies might find achieving transparency to be challenging, which is why it's important that you learn some makeup techniques. This class, we'll focus on practicing with powder."

"This is great! I finally have a chance to use this pencil." Under Cui Yue's horror-struck gaze, Cao Zhongnan produced a lip pencil from his pants pocket. "Now don't be shy, a-Yue. If you need them, I have eyeliner and nail polish in my room. Not sure which idiot burned me a whole set by mistake."

"Pay attention in class, Cao B! Pupil Cui, where is your powder puff!"

Taking their professor's angry shout as their cue, Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue dutifully began to learn makeup techniques.

By the end of the class, most of the students had a basic grasp of the fundamentals. The professor feigned ignorance of a certain duo of students who'd painted their lips to resemble sausages. He left them with the

homework, due next week, of creating a supernatural photo using the transparent makeup technique they'd just learned.

The students sighed as they started to leave the classroom, but the two sausage-mouthed students walked up to the professor, blinding his eyes with their self-confident faces.

"What?"

"Professor, do you have any makeup remover?"

"… No. Get out."

The glammed-out duo, Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue, made a stop at the bathroom to wash off their lipstick before scrambling to the library to research supernatural photos. Or, at least, they started off by hitting the books, but as time went on, one started playing with his phone and the other got lost in recipe land.

"Stop looking at that, a-Yue—look at this! 'Bride-to-Be Barges into Judge's Back Palace and Checks In; Furious Judge Opens Inferno Check-In Spot.' A new Inferno is opening; the Judge's court is hiring again!"

"You seem pretty happy about that?"

"There are other options in the afterlife, even if you don't become a malevolent spirit. We might not compare to the usual graduates from the Ghostly Guards program, but if there's a new Inferno opening soon, they must be hiring lots of guards. Maybe even you'll have a chance at being chosen, a-Yue. Isn't that something to be happy about?"

"I haven't given up on my dream of being a malevolent spirit yet…"

"Uh-huh, sure. Most of the ghosts in PIGS think the exact same thing. You'll give up by the time we graduate in fourth year."

Having killed some time in the library, Cui Yue announced he had to go home and cook. Cao Zhongnan gave him a meaningful look, his gaze containing the complicated message of "Oh-ho, so submissive that you'll go home willingly. It's only been half a day and you've already been very well trained, huh." However, Cui Yue ignored the missive.

Cui Yue originally planned to undertake a new challenge with the aspiration to forge his own path in the culinary world, but this goal was killed in its infancy by Bai Shaonan. As soon as he floated into the kitchen, he saw a takeout menu plastered on the wok. Scrawled in Bai Shaonan's writing were the words "Order one for me too."

Clearly, Bai Shaonan was afraid that Cui Yue would only order his own portion while treating Bai Shaonan as a lab mouse, ready to be fed another round of biochemical weaponry.

It was still early, so Cui Yue went to play with his phone on his bed. After a while, he got bored enough that he searched the article Cao Zhongnan had brought up earlier.

A... bride-to-be?

Cui Yue's eyes sparkled. If he had a mirror, he would see that his expression at this moment was the same as the day he wrote "Eat shit, Leung Feifan" on the hotel room wall.

When Bai Shaonan came back, Cui Yue brought up his intent to do an assignment in the human realm. He didn't forget that he was still a Bai family ghost under their protection. If he wanted to go out, he not only had to notify the head of the family but also needed to arrange for separate guards. He couldn't set out on a whim.

"Ghostly guards are only permitted to go up to the human realm under specific conditions—that's the rule. They can't go up with you," Bai Shaonan said as he chewed on a takeout pork bun. The difference between this and the MSG incense noodles from earlier was heaven and hell. If Cui Yue wasn't nearby, he might have even shed some tears.

"Does that mean that I can't hand in my assignment?" Cui Yue asked worriedly.

"No. They can't go, but other ghosts can. When are you planning on going?" Bai Shaonan understood the importance of ongoing education for the youth, especially someone like Cui Yue, whose grades were so poor it set

a new record. Besides, he didn't want Cui Yue's life to be impacted, so he would do his best to make arrangements for him whenever possible.

"The day after tomorrow, probably. I have to look for a target, so it may take a few days. Otherwise I won't be able to hand it in on time… But I get it if I can't." Cui Yue's voice grew smaller as he spoke. He understood his life took precedence over his homework, but if possible, he naturally would have liked to have both.

"The day after tomorrow… Hm. I have to be in a meeting with the board that day, so I can't accompany you. How about this: I'll get Qin Feng to go with you. He's even a PIGS graduate from U of U. You can learn a thing or two from an expert along the way." Bai Shaonan figured it was a perfect plan. Qin Feng's absence meant no ghost would yell at him if he was late to the meeting. He was thrilled just thinking about it.

Cui Yue was also very happy with this arrangement. Ever since he joined the cult of Qin Feng, he'd become a total fanboy. How could he not be excited to go on a trip to the human realm with the cult leader himself?

Yes, he'd borrow some nice clothes from Cao Zhongnan tomorrow. He couldn't bring Qin Feng the Great down if they were to travel together.

Bai Shaonan thought he had cooked up the ideal plan. At a time when neither he nor the ghostly guards could leave the underworld, Qin Feng was indeed the best and only choice. However, Bai Shaonan hadn't taken into account Qin Feng's diabolical character. Little did the dean know that not only would Qin Feng neglect to advise Cui Yue, he would stand by with his arms folded to watch the show unfold.

The result was as one might anticipate. After receiving Cui Yue's assignment, the professor rubbed his temples, picked up the photo, and floated toward the dean's office.

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07

"Good evening. Look what the wind blew in. What brings you to the dean's office today?" Bai Shaonan had only arrived a few seconds ahead of the professor. Just as he was ready to receive the daily barrage of insults from Qin Feng the Great, the unexpected savior had descended upon him. He was instantly all smiles, practically settling himself onto the professor's lap.

The professor ignored Bai Shaonan's overly enthusiastic welcome as he placed an object on the desk. He was even in the mood to tell a lame joke. "Cui is the wind that brought me here. Look for yourself, Dean."

The object in question was made of red cardstock and about palm size. Bai Shaonan laughed when he saw it. "Aha, you're giving me a wedding invite, Professor? The wedding gift's going to make a big dent in the old bank account…"

Halfway through his sentence, Bai Shaonan suddenly grew quiet. After turning the card over, he could see that, aside from the requisite information of a wedding invitation, there was also a sweet photo of the newlyweds facing each other with their foreheads touching… Or it *would* be sweet if he disregarded the one fifth of a blurry face above the bride's head. The interloper's eye sockets were so deep, it was obvious they were wearing too much foundation, and they had complemented the look with a swipe of overdrawn purple lips.

It was bad enough that the transparency powder was uneven, but who had taught Cui Yue how to apply eyeshadow or advised him to use purple lipstick?

"Get over here, Qin Feng!" Bai Shaonan almost smacked the wedding invite onto Qin Feng's face. "Weren't you tagging along that day? How could you let him screw around like this!"

To be perfectly honest, Qin Feng had also fallen speechless for a brief moment when he heard of Cui Yue's plan. However, he wasn't so kindhearted as to warn Cui Yue that his endeavors would surely piss off the professor. Just like how, even now, he was still justifying his actions with a straight face. "How do you expect students to improve if we don't allow them to learn from failure?"

"You could start by giving him some pointers. Advise him, and don't force your own sense of values on him!" Bai Shaonan continued yelling, even though half of his anger was directed at himself. How could he possibly have thought up such a terrible idea last week, of pairing Qin Feng, the remorseless educator, with Cui Yue?

The professor didn't expect Bai Shaonan to exhibit genuine rage, or to reveal that Cui Yue had been under Qin Feng's watch. He had come to complain, but now he was startled into speaking on Cui Yue's behalf. "Oh no, Dean. For a newcomer, Pupil Cui wasn't too bad at the materialization aspect. I understand that he wanted a high grade, and the truth is that all the wedding invites do have to be reprinted. It's just that there are so many potential targets in the human realm. It seems a little inappropriate to me that Pupil Cui forcibly turned their ritual of joy into a thing of horror."

Since the professor yielded, Bai Shaonan became cognizant of his own outburst. He took a deep breath to calm down, then said, "I will give him a good talking-to."

"Then I thank you in advance." The professor couldn't wait to get the hell out of dodge. What sick joke was this? Did he not know Qin Feng the

Great's reputation? How could he stay behind and listen as Qin Feng the Great Malevolent Spirit got yelled at by his boss? Did he not value this life?

As soon as the professor left, Bai Shaonan continued his tirade. "I didn't want to embarrass you too much in front of another ghost, but don't you see that the bride was wearing red? Look how you've treated your ward, letting him wear purple lipstick. In complement to the red, he should've used green to stand out more!"

Qin Feng was used to Bai Shaonan's odd fixations, but since his boss was angry, he had no choice but to explain: "There was no green lipstick for sale."

"Then you should've grabbed some grass and stuck it on his lips!"

"There wasn't a single blade of grass at the photography studio. Besides, Cui Yue wouldn't have the skills to make that work."

Bai Shaonan fell silent.

Like a deflated balloon, he sat back in his seat and studied the bizarre invitation. "Actually… the little hotpot has some good ideas. Why should terror be restricted by occasion? It could happen any time, regardless of whether they're having a wedding or a funeral. The professor has boxed himself in."

Qin Feng wasn't surprised at Bai Shaonan's overprotectiveness. "This is also why I let him be. Actually, Cui Yue was very good at picking his target —the groom is no innocent man. I went to see him in private after the photoshoot and instantly got two hundred thousand Ghoul Points in return."

Bai Shaonan glared at him. "Don't tell me you took the little hotpot too. He's already been made a target. If he gets that many Ghoul Points…"

"No, I went back after I returned him to your house." Qin Feng interrupted Bai Shaonan. "Speaking of which, the ghosts from Thailand want to have a meal with you at midnight. I bet you didn't bring your suit, huh?"

Bai Shaonan recalled the long-forgotten appointment and looked down at the flip-flops adorning his feet. He smiled in embarrassment. “They probably won’t mind, right?”

Qin Feng gave him a cold side-eye, indicating that the guests might not, but he did.

Bai Shaonan had no choice. “I’ll finish up the rest of this stuff, then go home and change before the meal, all right?”

Only then did Qin Feng begrudgingly acknowledge him.

“Oh, right. Where are we eating?” Bai Shaonan asked.

“At the back of Judge Yanluo’s court,” Qin Feng replied. “You can apply directly to the Judge for reincarnation after the meal.”

“I’m sorry, I see the error in my ways…”

Since the master of the house wasn’t home, Cui Yue enthusiastically continued on his journey of culinary refinement. It was too bad that, just when he took the ingredients out of the freezer, Bai Shaonan came to change his clothes and exposed his plan.

“Didn’t I tell you to get takeout if you’re hungry?” Bai Shaonan was getting a headache.

“Getting takeout every day costs a lot,” Cui Yue retorted. He counted his allowance every day, and afterward, decided that he really needed to be frugal.

“Your boss has money,” Bai Shaonan shot back and then, to protect the kitchen, decided to bring Cui Yue along to the meal. “Go change into something nicer, I’m taking you for some free food.”

“Free food?”

“Yes. Hurry up or we’ll be late. Do you have any formal wear?”

“Yes. Last time I went to the human realm with Secretary Qin, I borrowed Cao B’s clothes and haven’t returned them.”

"Why do you have to dress like that when you're just going to the human realm with Qin Feng?"

"He's my senior, you said so yourself."

Bai Shaonan tutted. He almost let jealousy get the better of him, but he remembered how Qin Feng had treated him like a naggy aunt would for all these years. Was the little hotpot trying to suck up to Qin Feng like he would a future auntie-in-law?

At the thought of Qin Feng wearing a red qipao with a peony in his hair and ruthlessly snapping at the little hotpot, "*How can you be so ignorant of the rules? Don't you know to pour tea for your auntie?*" Bai Shaonan couldn't help but laugh out loud.

The spectacle of Bai Shaonan laughing his way up the stairs made Cui Yue feel odd. He only said that Qin Feng the Great was his superior. Why had Bai Shaonan burst out laughing out of nowhere? And why had he sensed it was secretly at his expense?

Hopefully, Bai Shaonan wasn't laughing at him for dragging Qin Feng the Great down. Cui Yue was sick with worry.

Cui Yue assumed that Bai Shaonan had wanted to eat dinner with the professor, and so brought the ghostling along. It was only when they arrived at the hotel that he realized the guests were, in fact, not the professor but eight children who each looked no more than four years old.

"Come, Cui Yue. They're the Luk Thep PhDs from the Malevolent Spirits program in Chiang Mai University. They're here for a few days on an academic exchange. You can just refer to them as doctors." Bai Shaonan initially told him their names, but it was a little difficult for Cui Yue to remember eight Thai names at once, so he simplified to just "doctor."

"There's eight PhDs in their program?" Cui Yue was amazed.

"It's Thailand. They have an abundance of Luk Thep baby dolls. I heard of a school that has thirty-two Luk Thep professors, and all thirty-two of them would go teach one class together simultaneously." Bai Shaonan was

about to say more when one of the dolls spotted him and let out a string of sounds. The doctor's companions heard the commotion and all turned their heads.

Bai Shaonan displayed a respectful smile and quickened his steps to greet the Luk Thep, all while speaking perfectly fluent Thai.

Cui Yue's face stiffened. Bai Shaonan set him up! He didn't know a single word of Thai; why bring him here?

Bai Shaonan didn't have time to consider Cui Yue. After some small talk, he led the Luk Thep to their seats. Cui Yue could only follow silently. If it was up to him, he'd rather have pretended to run into Bai Shaonan on accident outside the hotel than be brought here specifically as an underling.

"Cui Yue, come sit down." After a whole string of Thai, Bai Shaonan finally said something Cui Yue could understand.

The Luk Thep didn't understand Mandarin. Their unblinking eyes watched as Bai Shaonan beckoned to the ghostling with boyish features, gesturing for him to come to his side. Cui Yue felt his scalp tingle from being stared at by eight whole PhDs. His embarrassment erupted all at once, manifesting in bright red cheeks and bright red ears.

"I wouldn't have come with you if I knew," Cui Yue complained quietly as soon as he sat down, since the Luk Thep couldn't understand him.

"What's that supposed to mean? Stop complaining when there's good food to eat. You're not the one responsible for networking." Bai Shaonan peered at Cui Yue's slightly puffed-up cheeks and couldn't help but reach out to flick one.

"Mmm…" Cui Yue let out a muffled sound as he realized he'd become the focus of the room. If Bai Shaonan wasn't holding his legs down, he would have given in to the urge to float up into the air and dash out of the hotel.

Bai Shaonan gave him a little smile before switching back to Thai. This time it was probably an introduction of Cui Yue; the baby dolls all gave him

a look before showing sudden realization.

One of the Luk Thep said something, and Bai Shaonan paused before quickly shaking his head. Even so, the smile at the corner of his lips broke through and ended up lasting the whole duration of the meal.

Cui Yue decided after the first bite of food that he would hear nothing and see nothing, zoning out the whole world and paying attention only to the delicious food before him. The baby dolls were child-sized and therefore didn't eat very much, while Bai Shaonan was concentrated on socializing and didn't have time to eat properly. Naturally, most of the food ended up in Cui Yue's stomach.

By the end of the meal, Cui Yue thought everything was over and done with. As he was getting ready to stand up and take his leave, Bai Shaonan suddenly grabbed his shoulder and said, with a fake smile, "Weren't you complaining before? Looks like you enjoyed your meal?"

A sense of foreboding struck Cui Yue. He smiled back awkwardly. "Did I…"

Bai Shaonan ignored Cui Yue's feeble attempt at a rebuttal. "Hurry and catch up to the doctors. They said they wanted to scare some people before they go back to their country. It's three in the morning right now. If you hurry, you can be back before six o'clock."

Cui Yue's eyes went wide in disbelief. Bai Shaonan had sold him off! First he would be sent off with the Luk Thep, then he'd have to follow them to Thailand to undergo a forced sex change, and after training to be a female undercover agent, he'd be sent to climb into bed with the Fu family… Bai Shaonan certainly was a cruel master. It seemed Bai Shaonan did like women, and not only that, Cui Yue never expected him to have a cheating kink too!

He didn't want to say goodbye to his dick. Could they compromise and have him cross-dress instead?

“Wait, you want me to go to the human realm? Guards won’t be able to follow me there. Are you going too?” Cui Yue stopped his imagination in its tracks. Some things were just headcanons. Based on his understanding of Bai Shaonan, his master wouldn’t do something so ridiculous.

After all, he had Qin Feng the Great handling everything in the background.

“Of course not; I have to go home and sleep. But don’t you worry, the Luk Thep are all amazing at combat. You’ll be totally fine with eight of them surrounding you.” Though unconcerned, Bai Shaonan saw that Cui Yue still looked worried, and consoled him by saying, “Once, when Qin Feng set his sights on the same target as the Luk Thep dolls, he withdrew without a second thought. See, if even Qin Feng didn’t want to go face-to-face with them, you can tell how powerful they are.”

What Bai Shaonan didn’t mention was that Qin Feng left the target to them because he thought the dolls’ cries were too irritating.

Cui Yue wanted to say something more, but one of the Luk Thep had already taken his hand, indicating that they were leaving now. Meanwhile, the asshole Bai Shaonan was waving goodbye to the nine of them, his debonair dismissal plain on his face.

The dolls gestured a few times with their hands, promising that the journey would be extremely safe and that Cui Yue could rest assured that nothing bad would happen.

As the one being kidnapped, Cui Yue could only express with tears in his eyes that he believed wholeheartedly in the doctors’ abilities, that of course everything would be all right if they said so. What other choice did he have?

The dolls didn’t pick their targets randomly. They’d long settled on a man who would pray to the Luk Thep but never came back to give his offering once his wish came true. They planned to go to the man’s residence and leave crimson handprints all over his wallpaper while he was asleep.

Cui Yue finally understood why the dolls allowed him to come along. Eight infant-sized dolls wouldn't be able to finish such a large house in one night. This meant that, as a ghost who had only come for the free food, he was now being used as free labor.

The dolls finished mixing a bucket of red paint, then started to make their little prints. Cui Yue sighed to himself and rolled up his sleeves in resignation before joining the fray.

Qin Feng took advantage of Bai Shaonan's absence to clock out early. Usually on these occasions, he would head straight for the pub to get a drink. Sometimes, when he got carried away, he would even lock eyes with the right ghost and go off cavorting for the rest of the day. After all, you can't be Bai Shaonan's secretary and still be a normal ghost. After he'd been working for a long time, he would come to the pub to blow off steam. This time, however, he headed to Cui Yue's dorm room. Cui Yue was obviously not there. The room contained only the scantily clad Cao Zhongnan.

When Qin Feng floated in, Cao Zhongnan was holding a slice of bread between his teeth as his fingers danced away on the keyboard. He was plotting the scene of Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue feeding ice cream to each other.

"Heartless, are you writing the new update to *The Dean Snatched My Roommate, What Do, Waiting Anxiously*" Qin Feng called out Cao Zhongnan's pen name without revealing emotion on his face. Recently, a fanfic had gone viral around campus for its uniquely fleshed-out characters and delicious sex scenes, as well as for details that realistically reflected U of U Northern Hell Campus life. After a short investigation, Qin Feng was surprised to find that the author was none other than a PIGS student, and Cui Yue's classmate.

Cao Zhongnan thought Cui Yue had suddenly returned. Never in a million years did he expect the visitor to be Qin Feng, who had clearly come prepared.

“Does Cui Yue know that he’s been sold out by someone he thought was a friend?” Qin Feng continued when Cao Zhongnan failed to respond.

Cao Zhongnan set the bread down. In stark contrast to his usual sunny disposition, he tilted his head to let his bangs droop over his dark eyes, which bewitchingly peeked in and out of view. He even adjusted his posture to reveal his lean waistline beneath his clothes, going so far as to sweeten his voice as he said, “But if I didn’t sell him out, how would I get a chance to see Qin Feng the Great?”

As soon as Cao Zhongnan adopted this pose, it became clear that he was very familiar with the art of seduction and was possibly even quite experienced.

Qin Feng’s eyes darkened as he slowly floated up to Cao Zhongnan. He bowed down to meet the pair of beguiling eyes and said softly, “I can’t believe I missed something—how could I have allowed a ghost like you to become Cui Yue’s roommate?”

Cao Zhongnan was not the least bit unhappy at this comment. On the contrary, a tingle arose from deep within him, making him quiver ever so slightly. He gazed at Qin Feng, intoxicated, and reached hesitantly up to the secretary’s pants with his foot. “Then, Qin Feng the Great… would you like to see exactly what kind of ghost I am?”

Qin Feng didn’t answer. He hadn’t even started, and the other ghost already looked half broken. That couldn’t be normal. Either there was something wrong with Cao Zhongnan himself, or another ghost had trained him to be this way.

Seeing that his target had failed to stir, Cao Zhongnan wrapped his arms around Qin Feng’s neck and leaned in. “Whatever Qin Feng the Great wants, I…”

Qin Feng considered for a moment before finally speaking, his tone cool.

That evening, Bai Shaonan was at work right on time, a once-in-a-blue-moon event. Qin Feng, on the other hand, arrived a whole half an hour late.

"You're late." Bai Shaonan cocked his head smugly. The fact that he was on time and Qin Feng was late gave him an odd sense of superiority.

"Went to get the documents for you." Qin Feng was as aloof as always. He opened his briefcase and handed Bai Shaonan an envelope. "You've got another mission. Take a look."

"The mailbox is right outside; it doesn't take any time to retrieve this." Bai Shaonan took the envelope but didn't open it right away. Strangely, Qin Feng was trying to change the subject, and he refused to comply. He studied Qin Feng for a while and finally figured out what was off ever since the other ghost had come in. "Why don't you sit down?"

"My back hurts." Qin Feng's face remained blank.

"What's wrong? Do you need to go to the infirmary later?"

"It's not a big deal, no need to see the doctor." Qin Feng waved it off. "Instead of focusing on me, why don't you talk about why you're slouching against the desk, not working, and waiting for me."

Bai Shaonan's attention was successfully shifted once he'd been exposed. He took out his phone and opened up a photo. "The little hotpot went to the human realm this morning with the Luk Thep. The dolls sent me these pictures—see." There was excitement in his voice.

"You let him go by himself with the dolls?" Qin Feng was unenthused.

"What's the problem? With eight baby dolls there, even thousand-year-old ladies in white would have to give way to them. The little hotpot was in good hands. Besides, he's already back; what's there to be afraid of?" Bai Shaonan was no different than a father eager to share pictures of his baby, impatiently beckoning Qin Feng to look at the photos. "Anyway, look how diligently he's putting the handprints on the wall."

Qin Feng was forced to admire the photos, but his sharp eyes noticed that Cui Yue wasn't wearing shoes. Furthermore, there seemed to be something on the wall behind him that was abnormally larger than a handprint.

"What's that? Zoom in there."

"That's obviously the little hotpot's hand…" Bai Shaonan trailed off. Upon zooming in, it became apparent to their two pairs of eyes that what was pictured clearly wasn't a handprint but a footprint.

Bai Shaonan was momentarily speechless. A combination of hand and footprints were usually found in creations of art, not horror.

The guilty target would panic upon first seeing the handprints. At that point, it wouldn't make a big difference whether the handprints were large or small. But to see an adult footprint… Well, wouldn't most relatively brave humans pause to reflect on that?

How were they supposed to scare people that way?

"The Luk Thep are flying back to Thailand today. They won't have time to come file a complaint." It was Qin Feng who broke the silence at the end.

"Yes, they'll forget all about this after the plane ride," Bai Shaonan lied to himself. "Also, they asked yesterday if little hotpot and I are a couple. Haha. Even outside ghosts think we look like a couple."

Qin Feng decided not to enlighten Bai Shaonan on why he would be so happy about this fact. "Speaking of Cui Yue, I was planning to talk to you. I've looked into him multiple times. Not only is there no record of Cui Yue's life before death, but there's nothing at all pertaining to his previous lives, his number of reincarnations, or what his next life will hold." His expression was serious.

Bai Shaonan's expression darkened. "Nothing at all?"

Qin Feng nodded. "That's right, nothing at all. It means that Cui Yue is a completely new life. But according to my research, there hasn't been a new

life in the last hundred years."

"If I remember correctly, there is only one ghost in hell with absolutely no history." Bai Shaonan's voice took on an inadvertent note of caution.

"That's right. The last ghost with absolutely no history was your dumb ass," said Qin Feng.

"I'm not the dumbass. At least I didn't throw out my back," Bai Shaonan said haughtily, glaring at Qin Feng.

Qin Feng paid no heed to Bai Shaonan's quibbling and continued on the subject. "What should be done about Cui Yue?"

Bai Shaonan thought for a second and threw the question back at him. "What do you think the little hotpot is capable of?"

"With his intellect, nothing," Qin Feng answered sincerely.

"Well, there we go. Let's maintain the status quo for now. There'll always be some others who can't help but rear their heads." Bai Shaonan was unconcerned.

Qin Feng wasn't surprised at this response. Unless Cui Yue was actually holding up a flag and yelling for Bai Shaonan's demise, Bai Shaonan wouldn't resolve to get rid of the ghostling. He gingerly took his seat and said, "By the way, I'm leaving early today."

"Yeah, yeah, go ahead. Coming to work with a bad back… I don't know if it's your back or your brain that's broken."

"If you really want to put it that way, I should tell you that I came in today not for work but to investigate a certain student."

"Who's the unlucky ghost?"

"That's not important, but the fact that he dared to try and entrap me *is*, so I will gladly play along."

Bai Shaonan shrank back into his own seat in wary silence. Qin Feng's smile was like Satan's. If he didn't get back to work, he'd probably become the second ghost to "play along" with Qin Feng.

Cui Yue got back to Bai Shaonan's house at half past seven in the evening. He rushed to take a shower and then rushed to get out the door. After experiencing the life of a worker ant, he finally understood why Bai Shaonan always left the house after him. Even an extra second of sleep was worth the risk of being late.

Cui Yue arrived at the dorms and was surprised to find Cao Zhongnan still asleep. "Get up, Cao B! We're gonna be late!" he said anxiously.

Woken up by the noise, Cao Zhongnan rubbed his eyes but didn't get up from the bed. "Mmm… You're here, a-Yue… I'm not going to class today…" he said lazily.

Something seemed off about Cao Zhongnan. "Are you all right? Why do you look like you haven't slept?" Cui Yue asked out of worry.

"My butt hurts. I'm not going to class today." Cao Zhongnan yawned and didn't answer the question.

His butt hurt? Could he have had diarrhea for the whole of yesterday? "Then I'll bring some porridge of incense sticks for you after class, okay?" offered the good and thoughtful classmate Cui Yue as innocently as could be.

Cao Zhongnan was already half asleep. He couldn't even bother to open his mouth, only nodding vaguely in response.

Looks like Cao B really doesn't feel well; *better not disturb him*, Cui Yue thought as he tiptoed out of the room, completely forgetting the fact that he was already a ghost floating in midair and wouldn't make a sound regardless.

After Cui Yue left, the seemingly asleep Cao Zhongnan slowly opened his eyes. He flipped back the covers, revealing his utterly naked body and the mess on the sheets. He allowed what was inside his body to trickle down the length of his legs as he floated nonchalantly into the bathroom for a shower.

He knew very well that if he wrote Bai Shaonan into the text, the first one to get on his case wouldn't be the main character himself but Qin Feng. The rumors around campus gave him the perfect opportunity to get close to the secretary in a way that wouldn't completely offend the two other ghosts.

Obviously, the plan had worked.

A triumphant smile spread across Cao Zhongnan's lips. Thinking back on the madness of this morning, a dazed look once again emerged in his eyes. He decided that he would send Qin Feng a nude later.

"Now, this will be a fun class today. We've invited a guest to share her expertise with everyone. Let's have a warm welcome for the infamous main character of Wenshu University's ghost story: Braid Girl!"

Without Cao Zhongnan there and therefore no ghost to take notes for him, Cui Yue had no choice but to sit dutifully in the front row in order to force himself to pay attention. He looked over at the female ghost curiously. A braid draped both behind and in front of her face, perfectly positioned to cover her features. She was wearing a flowery Tang dynasty blouse with black pants and white tennis shoes—the standard '60s factory worker garb. The story of the Braid Girl started circulating around Wenshu University in the 1960s, so it wasn't odd that she was dressed like this.

Cui Yue glanced down at the syllabus for the presentation. Braid Girl specialized in crying with her back turned. Whenever a student went up to inquire, she would complain that nobody wanted to talk to her. Normally, people would reply with something along the lines of "I'm not like that," after which Braid Girl would turn around. The student would then discover the long braid trailed both in front of and behind her. She would often frequent a particular path known as One Braid Road, which had been named after her—a truly impressive feat for a malevolent spirit. No wonder she had been invited to share her wisdom.

“That’s very flattering, Professor. I’m now just a character of a little story that orientation leaders like to tell the new students to scare them. There’s no place for me on the Ghoul Chart.” Perhaps because her face was covered by hair, Braid Girl seemed to sound as though she were speaking to them from a distance. If he wasn’t sitting in the first row, Cui Yue would have had trouble making her out.

Braid Girl’s presentation was very entertaining. Not only did she talk about her process of becoming famous in the school, she also analyzed her own situation, concluding that too much fame was sometimes a predicament on its own.

“Everyone’s impression of me is of my back turned. If I use any other tactic, then it wouldn’t be Braid Girl doing the terrorizing anymore but some other ghost. People’s idea of me has limited my behavior. That’s why, everyone, when you scare people in the future, remember to vary your tactics. Otherwise, once you gain a reputation, you’ll only ever be able to use the same technique. Eventually people will no longer be scared. Anyway, that’s it for today. Thank you all.”

As soon as Braid Girl finished her speech, the students started up an unbidden round of applause for a valuable lesson learned. The professor was very satisfied, announcing on the spot that Braid Girl had promised to take ten students to Wenshu University on an educational field trip.

Cui Yue quietly closed his notebook. Of course he wanted to go. But he didn’t forget his current position. It was too bad, but survival was more important. Remembering that Cao Zhongnan was still waiting in the dorms for him to bring the porridge, he grabbed his bag and floated out of the classroom.

“Cui Yue, can we talk in private?”

As soon as he exited the class, a female voice sounded behind him. Cui Yue looked back to see three female ghosts looking at him nervously together, one of whom was blushing suspiciously.

Cui Yue's heart skipped a beat. Could it be that romance had come knocking?

Oh-ho, how awkward. Bai Shaonan was still crushing on him, and here he was getting confessions from girls. What a curse it was to be popular.

Cui Yue's upturned lips betrayed his good mood. He followed them to a remote corner, still pondering how to react when responding to the confession, when one of the girls was already impatiently pulling out a box of chocolate. With reddened cheeks, she said as if going to her death, "Cui Yue, this is a little gift from all of us. May you and Dean Bai live happily ever after!"

Cui Yue blinked. *May you and Dean Bai live happily ever after*? What in the hell?

"Don't be shy. It's just a little gesture of appreciation." Another girl was also blushing as she pushed the chocolate into Cui Yue's completely frozen arms.

What happened to his confession from a girl?

What happened to his popularity?

The female ghosts refused to participate in a drama of campus romance with Cui Yue. They had even told each other in secret that though they might not necessarily get married themselves, their OTP absolutely would.

He wasn't married to Bai Shaonan; it was Bai Shaonan who had a crush on him, okay? Cui Yue wanted to cry but no tears would come. He looked down stiffly at the chocolates, then back up at the oddly excited girls and took some effort to find his own voice again, "You're mistaken. The dean and I aren't…"

"It's all right. You have bodyguards following you everywhere; instead of the dorms, you go to a luxury residential neighborhood in the mornings; your grades are abysmal, yet you still got into PIGS; you're impervious to the complaints from professors. It's okay, Cui Yue. We *know*."

"I told you, it's not like that…"

"Be good, little Cui Yue. Take these and enjoy them with Dean Bai."

"I'm not…"

"We still have class later, so see you around."

The girls looked as though they'd accomplished something significant by successfully delivering the gift. They winked at him before they left, gesturing for him to hurry and make use of the chocolate. Cui Yue was planning to throw the box away, but his foodie instincts ultimately prevented him from doing so. He even opened up the package to try a piece.

Based on the exquisite packaging, Cui Yue figured the chocolate was probably some delicacy. He picked out one coated in gold flakes and popped it in his mouth.

A rich cocoa flavor exploded over his tongue. Cui Yue thought that it was delicious, and then he wasn't thinking anything anymore.

Half an hour later, Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan made a rare appearance at the campus clinic.

"How's Cui Yue doing?"

It was no wonder that Bai Shaonan was anxious, making his way immediately after he heard the news. Combined with the midnight feast, this incident was liable to make him seem like a criminal responsible for working his student to the bone until the ghostling passed out. However, inside the infirmary, Cui Yue hardly looked pale or weak lying on the cot. Rather, he seemed in deep sleep.

"He's not in any danger; he only suddenly fell asleep." The doctor was initially also taken aback when he saw some students carry Cui Yue in, but to his surprise, the ghostly guards seemed even more concerned than the students. Soon after, both the dean and Qin Feng personally showed up, which clearly demonstrated Cui Yue's position as a VIP.

"Why would he suddenly fall asleep in the hallway?" Bai Shaonan asked.

"About that…" The doctor begrudgingly told the truth: "He ingested some 'Lovey-Dovey Lotus Eve Delight.' Going into a deep slumber is a normal reaction."

"Lovey-dovey… eve delight?" Bai Shaonan had never heard of it before, though its name was pretty self-explanatory. Only, why would the little hotpot go and eat that?

Cui Yue could simply voice his request, and Bai Shaonan would surely guarantee him the most wondrous night, more delightful than any "eve."

"It's in this box." The doctor pointed at the box of chocolates on the table—the one given to Cui Yue by the girls. "This brand specializes in kinky flavors. With no indication on the packaging and only the name of the product at the bottom of the box, Pupil Cui probably ate it by accident."

"Why does he have something like this?"

"Some female classmates gave it to him. Specifically, to you and Cui Yue." Qin Feng came through the door, having heard the whole story from the ghostly guards. "The guards saw that it was only a little box of snacks, so they didn't intervene."

"What do you mean a 'little box of snacks'? If that was poison instead of an aphrodisiac, he'd already be dead." There was anger in Bai Shaonan's voice.

"Hey, don't get mad at me. If you must yell at someone, go find the ghosts responsible for it." Qin Feng changed the topic. "But if it's an aphrodisiac, why is he asleep?"

Bai Shaonan paused. Right. Shouldn't he have been burning with lust under the influence of an aphrodisiac? The little hotpot didn't look like he was having a wet dream, and new ghosts wouldn't be impotent so early in afterlife.

"This drug has always been misunderstood as an aphrodisiac, but it's much closer to a psychiatric drug. It suppresses the user's sense of reason in order to reveal what they're really thinking at the back of their minds. To

put it simply, it brings their subconscious to the forefront. However, sometimes it's not just love or affection that comes to the surface but negative emotions as well. It wouldn't be wrong to call it a double-edged sword."

"Pupil Cui is sleeping right now because the drug is taking effect. When he wakes up, his reasoning will be suppressed, and he might exhibit some extreme behaviors based on… lust, sentiment, or even irritation. It all depends on how his body reacts to the substance. Although, if there are ghosts beside him providing intentional guidance, I believe he can be led into a relatively tranquil state."

Hearing this, all Bai Shaonan wanted to do was take Cui Yue home immediately. No joke, how could he let any other ghosts see the little hotpot's alluring side? That aside, he still asked intently, "Will the drug have any side effects?"

"To humans, it's a toxic substance, but it has no long-term impact on ghosts. Otherwise the chocolates wouldn't be out in the public market. Its effect lasts about three hours—I'm talking about three hours starting from the time he wakes up," the doctor promised.

"I understand. Thank you, Doctor. Qin Feng, you can take over from here."

Bai Shaonan looked composed as he spoke, but Qin Feng could see the anxiety burning away at him. In response, the secretary only gave his boss a cold glance but did not tease him.

At the very thought of the little hotpot, eyes red like a white lotus just starting to gain color, murmuring his love and enjoying eves upon eves of delights with him, Bai Shaonan felt like his heart could race out of the atmosphere. Bearing in mind the idea that his own bed was larger and more convenient for such activities, he carried Cui Yue straight to his bedroom after getting home, then waited impatiently for Cui Yue to wake.

But no, he couldn't let the little hotpot see his overeagerness. Around the twentieth time that Bai Shaonan circled the bed, he figured his composure should measure up to his age, so he rushed out to the study, found a tome of *Book of Songs*, and sitting beside the bed, started to read.

And as for how he could possibly read poetry that was upside down? That wasn't within Bai Shaonan's range of concern.

He felt like, Sun Wukong, the monkey born from stone and jailed under the mountain for five hundred years. Finally, he heard Cui Yue's voice. Bai Shaonan tossed the book to the foot of the bed, smoothed his hair, and just as he was about to lean his face in, suddenly saw that something was wrong. Cui Yue was frowning; the rest of his face was likewise contorted and indecipherable murmurs issued from the ghostling's mouth, the agony and despair of which were apparent to the most oblivious ghost.

"Wake up, little hotpot! Cui Yue! Can you hear me?"

Cui Yue was having a nightmare.

In his dream, he was standing on the rooftop of a thirty-story building; below him were feral dogs trying desperately to climb up. The dogs' eyes were dull, their saliva flowing down to cover their chins, and their fangs were so sharp they could crush rocks.

Cui Yue backed up in fear, but there seemed to be an invisible pin nailing him to the rooftop, inhibiting his movements. He was gripped by a horror so intense that tears were gathering in his eyes. Whenever the dogs climbed up to the rooftop would be the moment he would be torn to pieces.

"Don't be scared. I'll deal with it."

A man's voice sounded beside his ear. Cui Yue's mind calmed as soon as he heard it. He looked up but couldn't make out the other person's features. He knew, however, that it was a trustworthy presence.

"Thank yo— WHAT ARE YOU DOING!" Cui Yue hadn't even finished his sentence when the man leapt right off the roof, meeting the countless vicious foes with his bare hands.

Cui Yue didn't dare look down; he was scared to see the carnage. The yelps from the dogs below grew more excited by the second, as if celebrating the arrival of food delivered straight into their mouths. Cui Yue peered side to side and finally found a phone. His hand trembled as he dialed the number for help, hoping that someone on the other end could provide assistance.

"Hello, how can I help you?"

"Please, someone jumped off the roof. Hurry and save him!"

"I'm sorry. We didn't receive any relevant intel, and until we can verify the information you've provided, we cannot provide any assistance."

"Hurry up and send someone, he's very important to me. He's about to die!"

"I'm sorry. We didn't receive any relevant intel, and until we can verify the information you've provided, we cannot provide any assistance."

"Please—they're about to climb up here! I'm begging you… please! I can't lose him! Please!"

"I'm sorry. We didn't receive any relevant intel, and until we can verify the information you've provided, we cannot provide any… xiao-Lan? Why have you come to find Daddy? Didn't I tell you to stay inside Wenshu University?"

"Daddy, I miss you."

The nightmare ended abruptly. Cui Yue opened his eyes wide.

The devastating anguish in his heart made it hard for him to see anything as tears streamed from his eyes. In the darkness, it was almost as if he was still in the dream, still on that gloomy rooftop. He wanted to sit up, but the sheets tangled around him. He tried to struggle, but his nerves only made the sheets wind tighter around him.

"Everything's okay, Cui Yue. Everything's okay. It's just a dream, it's okay. Don't be scared…"

A familiar voice sounded beside his ear. Cui Yue was pulled into an embrace. The chest was cold but surprisingly effective at calming his still trembling heart.

"It's only a dream, little hotpot. Don't cry."

The kind tenor rang out again. Cui Yue could feel the fingers gently wiping away the tears on his cheeks and the mist that obscured his vision.

Only a dream?

"Yes, only a dream. Don't be scared." Bai Shaonan lowered his eyes as his big hand stroked Cui Yue's shoulder to soothe him. "Do you know who I am, little hotpot?"

Little hotpot.

Cui Yue's consciousness started to return. There was only one ghost in the whole ghostly earth who would call him that. "Bai… Shaonan," he said in a raspy voice as he gripped the other ghost's shirt.

"That's right. I'm here, so everything's okay."

Bai Shaonan secretly let out a sigh of relief. In his slumber, not only had Cui Yue been keening in sorrow, he had soon started to scream out loud as well. Bai Shaonan was so startled that he put his call to the campus infirmary on pause, dashing instead to the bed in an attempt to wake the ghost up. Just now when Cui Yue opened his eyes, he was obviously still overwhelmed by the negative emotions. Bai Shaonan needed to slowly guide him out.

That Eves Delight thing—he swore never to let Cui Yue touch it again.

Cui Yue stared dumbly at Bai Shaonan, belatedly coming to the conclusion that everything on the rooftop had only been a bad dream.

He was Cui Yue, and the one holding him was Bai Shaonan. He was having a nightmare, so Bai Shaonan came to comfort him.

It wasn't until this moment that Cui Yue realized how intimate their positions were.

Never mind the fact that they were both on the bed, Cui Yue was even sitting on Bai Shaonan's lap. His whole body was practically squished in front of the other ghost's chest. He could look down and see the muscular arms circling his body.

He should feel awkward. He should get away from Bai Shaonan's embrace. But for the sake of that inexplicable calm in his heart, he didn't want to do that. He even wished to remain there a little longer.

He was going to be a malevolent spirit in the future. Ghouls scared people; they weren't supposed to blush. This was why Cui Yue refused to blush… even though red had already tinted the tips of his ears.

From the moment Cui Yue had fully regained consciousness, Bai Shaonan could sense the stiffness from the little hotpot in his arms. He thought the little hotpot would ask to be released, but his shirt was still gripped tightly in the ghostling's hand, like a drowning person holding tightly on to a log in the rapids. Bai Shaonan's heart softened at this conflicting attitude. If he wasn't dedicating all his efforts toward self-restraint, he would have gone in for a kiss long ago.

"I had a nightmare," Cui Yue spoke up, feeling the need to explain his abnormal behavior.

"Mm-hmm, I know. It's all right," Bai Shaonan answered, not planning to tell Cui Yue that he was under the influence of drugs. It wouldn't do any good to throw the ghostling's emotions into turmoil again.

"I dreamt of you," Cui Yue continued. Upon coming back to himself, he instantly recognized the voice that soothed him in his dream. As for the voice on the other end of the phone—he thought it sounded familiar as well, but he couldn't remember who it was.

Bai Shaonan's expression shifted slightly. A nightmare and he was in it? Was he really such a scary figure in the little hotpot's subconscious?

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08

After Cui Yue recounted the entirety of the nightmare, Bai Shaonan's expression went straight from slightly dark to positively grim.

The scene of jumping off a rooftop to fight dogs happened to exactly match the events of a mission Bai Shaonan had fulfilled six months ago. He'd underestimated the stinking cultivator's power and ended up trapped on the rooftop. Just as he was about to steal away into thin air, the guy had used a talisman and set the dogs loose on him.

That day, he'd ended up with serious injuries all over. His entire body had to be rebuilt, but Qin Feng hadn't said anything, opting to only glare at him for a whole month with a look reserved specifically for trash.

If Cui Yue ate the bullshit Eves Delight thing and dreamt of a comparable scene, did that mean the memory had already been stowed away in his subconscious?

A coincidence? Sorry. Bai Shaonan didn't believe in such things.

"Dean Bai?" Cui Yue asked softly. Since Bai Shaonan fell into silence, Cui Yue quietly removed himself from the other ghost's lap and relocated to the bed.

"Hm? I'm fine." As soon as Bai Shaonan snapped out of it, he discovered the absence of weight on his legs. It was highly disappointing, and he wondered if the little hotpot had been dissatisfied. Otherwise why would he not sit for a while longer?

Perhaps it was time to work some more spring into his thigh muscles.

Bai Shaonan's attention had drifted off to Satan knows where, so after some thought, Cui Yue decided to return the favor and patted his shoulder, saying, "Don't be scared, Dean Bai. It's only a dream."

Cui Yue's train of thought was very simple: Bai Shaonan fell into a trance after he heard about the nightmare, which meant there was something in the dream that scared him; since there had been only himself and the dogs, Bai Shaonan was probably afraid of the dogs.

He never expected the great head of the Bai family would be scared of dogs. Cui Yue thought he'd discovered a secret. His eyes shone from his stifled laughter, and his originally tense expression slowly relaxed.

Guessing at what Cui Yue was imagining, Bai Shaonan didn't know whether to laugh or cry. The tension on his face finally eased, yet he didn't correct the misunderstanding. He was happy to see the little hotpot distracted by something else.

Now that he'd relaxed, Cui Yue let out a yawn. When terror disappears, drowsiness soon follows. Seeing this, Bai Shaonan set him down gently and said, "Sleep, this time there will be no more bad dreams."

Cui Yue wriggled a little but couldn't win against the comfort of the bed. As he conceded and pulled the duvet over himself, he suddenly realized that something was wrong—the duvet in *his* room wasn't blue.

His eyes instantly widened and quickly swept over the whole space. There was absolutely nothing familiar about it. "This isn't my room!" He panicked.

At first, Bai Shaonan was a little worried at Cui Yue's sudden panic but, hearing those words, only smiled nonchalantly. "Yes, it's my room. What about it?"

"Why am I sleeping in your room?"

"You were having a nightmare, so I carried you over here." Bai Shaonan said this boldly, as if that really were the case.

"No, I was at school…"

"You passed out at school from a lack of sleep, so I brought you back." Bai Shaonan patted Cui Yue's head. He didn't want the little hotpot to focus on the school part, so he added gently, "What? Do you want me to sleep with you?"

A red flush erupted on Cui Yue's face as he insisted, "No. I can go back to my own room."

"No way. Your bed's too small. What if you have a nightmare again?" Bai Shaonan rebutted, even though he was the one comforting Cui Yue a second ago claiming that there would be "no more bad dreams."

"My small bed has nothing to do with nightmares."

"It doesn't have anything to do with nightmares, but there's no room on there for me to watch over you. Be good, and sleep here today, okay?" For some unfathomable reason, Bai Shaonan was confident that Cui Yue would want to sleep with him and was only refusing out of shyness. Well, if his ghost lover-to-be was bashful, he didn't mind accommodating him.

The redness on Cui Yue's little face only intensified. He saw right through the way Bai Shaonan was treating him like a child! But! If he really had another nightmare, it was true that he definitely wouldn't be as scared with Bai Shaonan nearby…

Seeing Cui Yue's resolve swaying, Bai Shaonan willingly took a step back. "How about this: I'll go out for a while and come back once you're asleep. Sound good?"

Cui Yue thought about it and eventually nodded. The smile in Bai Shaonan's eyes deepened—the little hotpot acted like he'd been patronized and didn't want to admit it. Bai Shaonan couldn't help but lean down and—before he lost control and sealed up that little mouth—planted a gentle kiss on the ghostling's forehead instead.

"Goodnight, my little hotpot."

Cui Yue saw Bai Shaonan's handsome face zooming in bigger and bigger, and before he could react, something cold touched down on his

forehead before quickly departing. By the time his brain realized it was Bai Shaonan's lips, the culprit had already tucked him in and swished out of the room, leaving only a night lamp on.

Bai Shaonan had snuck a kiss from him… No. He wasn't sneaking, he had done it openly. Cui Yue belatedly wondered whether he'd been sexually harassed.

Then again, Bai Shaonan had always had a crush on him, so Cui Yue understood if he occasionally couldn't help his impulses, especially when the target of his affections was still lying in bed… Cui Yue's eyes suddenly widened. Did Bai Shaonan bring him back to this room because he was planning to XXXX with him?!

Which was to say, he'd narrowly escaped a chastity crisis? No, no no. He needed to go back to his own room.

Cui Yue flipped back the covers, and just as he was about to get out of bed, another question materialized in his mind. What if he had another nightmare?

The hopelessness in his dream, the relief after waking up; both were already carved into his bones. Cui Yue's movement stilled as hesitation held him in place. He started to think seriously about which frightened him more, losing his chastity or being terrorized?

And as for how a malevolent spirit could be scared of terror—well, Cui Yue's little brain was no longer able to consider such high-level questions.

Bai Shaonan had always been a solid and grounding presence to him. Furthermore, the dean was incredibly benevolent to his subordinates, never fighting back even as Qin Feng the Great regularly berated him and arranging bodyguards for Cui Yue when he found out the ghostling had been threatened… So he would probably respect Cui Yue's wishes too, right?

The scale in Cui Yue's heart quivered, tipping in favor of Dean Bai. Remembering the new world Cao Zhongnan had introduced him to at the

casino hotel, he privately decided that maybe he could be fine with this as long as his butt stayed off-limits.

Besides, they were both male ghosts, Cui Yue thought. Mutual hand jobs were basically mutual aid; neither of them would lose or gain anything from it. And if it really did get to that point, he probably wouldn't have the energy to have nightmares.

The more he thought about it, the more reasonable it sounded. He hoisted his legs back onto the bed, covered himself again, and prepared to sleep.

Maybe if he was asleep, Bai Shaonan wouldn't have the heart to wake him.

Cui Yue thought slumber would come to him quickly. Unfortunately, as soon as his head touched the pillow, he immediately caught the chilly scent that belonged to Bai Shaonan. He tucked himself even deeper under the covers, but now it wasn't just in his nose—Bai Shaonan's scent enveloped him from all sides, inescapably from all three hundred sixty degrees.

It just so happened that he didn't hate the scent and even thought it was kind of pleasant. He'd never had a sip of alcohol before, but Cui Yue thought it was probably similar to this. Yes, it was unfamiliar at first, but further contact naturally only made it more appealing.

Realizing what he was thinking beneath the covers, Cui Yue immediately blushed. He wriggled out from under the sheets like a caterpillar and sat up in bed. The sheets, the pillow, and even the air in the room contained Bai Shaonan's scent, and all of it made Cui Yue's heartstrings trill.

Though he was fully clothed, Cui Yue felt like he was already stripped down and being pulled into Bai Shaonan's arms to engage in some lights-out activities.

All you have to do is run out of the room, or so Cui Yue told himself. However, his body was at odds with his thoughts as he lay back down and

pulled the covers over his face until only his eyes and nose were showing. He allowed the scent to envelop him. He even reached out and touched his own forehead. There were no mirrors in the room, so naturally Cui Yue couldn't see his own face, though if he had, he would realize he looked like a girl going through the rites of first love.

Bai Shaonan's expression transformed as soon as he left the room. The tenderness he deployed on consoling Cui Yue slipped off him like a mask, revealing his actual icy cold interior. He was about to call Qin Feng when Qin Feng's call came in first.

"What's up?"

"The ghostly guard is here. They say Fu Junzhan was found dead in his residence. There's another 'Lovingly He' in his mailbox."

"… You're on campus?"

"Yes. Are you coming now?"

"No." Bai Shaonan peered at his bedroom door. "Something's not quite right with the little hotpot. Can you guys come here?"

"Should be doable with some adjustments."

An hour later, Qin Feng and the ghostly guard arrived at Bai Shaonan's home.

"What's going on?" Bai Shaonan skipped the small talk and went straight to the point as soon as they sat down on the sofa.

The guard handed him a sheet of paper. "This is the letter we just found. Take a look."

Dearest Mr. Fu Junzhan,

I remember the way you looked at me that day, like the brightest star in the night sky.

I remember your voice when you called to me that day, like the most beautiful string in the world.

I remember those lips when you spoke to me that day, their shape so distinct, it was intoxicating.

No one understands your heart more than I. The long war has ended, perhaps it's time for the curtains to drop.

You are also tired, so let me close your eyes.

Lovingly,

He

Bai Shaonan remained silent, so the guard continued, "Around three o'clock in the afternoon, Fu Junzhan's lover went to his residence to surprise him but was surprised instead to find not even a shadow of a ghost inside. Meanwhile, all the papier-mâché dolls inside were destroyed. That's when we were contacted."

"Fu Wanli, Fu Junzhan." Bai Shaonan handed the letter back to the ghostly guard and cut to the chase. "Both these ghosts were on the school's board of directors."

"We've already fortified security for the other members right away. We'll also schedule them for questioning," the guard immediately promised.

"Two out of six dead. It's about time for the Fu family to do some reflection and not take in just any ghost." Bai Shaonan smirked. "By the way, last time we held a meeting to discuss bringing in another ghost to take Fu Wanli's place. If I remember correctly, I think we ended up going with Fu Junzhan's yes-man?"

"We'll be sure to investigate."

"Speaking of which, how's the Fu Wanli case going?"

"It's under investigation."

The guard was vague, which meant there was no progress. That didn't trouble Bai Shaonan. The murderer would have finished preparations to go into hiding before daring to declare war against the Fu family. In fact, if the

case was resolved too quickly, he would have suspected the guards of taking in a random ghost as scapegoat.

"And what about the casino hotel?"

"That's also under investigation. Oh, right. Doctor Bai Qinghe has already been released. There's no evidence indicating that he's the perpetrator."

"*Tsk*. No wonder I've had so many unknown callers on my phone lately."

Bai Shaonan would never admit that he'd blocked the other ghost's number earlier in a fit. He was about to complain that the ghostly guards should have locked Bai Qinghe away for longer when he spotted the hem of a familiar set of clothing in the hallway from the corner of his eyes. He didn't hesitate to float out of his seat. "What are you doing down here, little hotpot? Did you have a bad dream again?"

His voice was dripping with such tenderness in stark contrast with his earlier mocking that the guard couldn't stop the horror from showing on his face. Never did he imagine that Bai Shaonan could be like this. However, when Qin Feng quickly shot a glare in warning, the guard scrambled to cast his eyes down and righted his posture, feigning he hadn't heard anything.

Cui Yue flushed when he realized he'd been discovered. He had come downstairs to quench his thirst but inadvertently overheard Bai Shaonan talking to an unfamiliar voice. When he gleaned the conversation had to do with the Fu family, he couldn't stop himself from hiding behind the walls to eavesdrop.

"I was coming down for water…"

"What did you hear?" Bai Shaonan said with a pointed look, though he didn't go as far as to expose Cui Yue's lie.

Cui Yue chose to be honest. "That two board of directors are dead."

So he'd heard everything? Bai Shaonan arched his brow and pinched Cui Yue's cheek as punishment. "Never mind. This concerns you too. If you

can't sleep, then come listen."

Qin Feng and the guard had no qualms with this. They even ran through the sequence of events again for Cui Yue, making sure that he was apprised of the recent developments.

Cui Yue only said one thing in response. "I haven't seen that threatening letter."

The guard knew from the way Bai Shaonan spoke to Cui Yue that this ghost needed to be treated with respect, so he handed over the letter addressed to Fu Junzhan. "It's not that different from this one. There were only variations in a few words. You can take a look."

Qin Feng raised his brows and glanced at Bai Shaonan. Wasn't he the one in charge of explaining the situation to Cui Yue? Why was it that the ghost at the center of the case didn't even know the content of the letter?

Bai Shaonan refused to look up, just as he was refusing to admit how he'd forgotten to mention this to the little hotpot.

"'Lovingly He'? I don't know this ghost."

Cui Yue gave the letter back to the ghostly guard. He didn't understand why a ghost with such a bizarre sign-off would fix their sights on him.

"It's only normal that you don't recognize them. Fu Wanli and Fu Junzhan were probably the ones who knew them." Bai Shaonan scoffed. "I don't even know where Fu Junzhan lives, but the murderer does."

"You'd forget even if you knew," Qin Feng rebutted.

"That's true."

"Wanli… Junzhan…" Cui Yue frowned. Why did the two names sound so familiar?

"'A journey of ten thousand miles for the fight,
o'er mountains and passes as if in flight;
the chilly air chimes the watchman's rattle,
and moonlight shines on her armor.
Generals die after a hundred battles,

Soldiers return after ten years.'"

Once he finished reciting the poem, Qin Feng took the opportunity to explain. "The six board members were named after 'The Ballad of Mulan.' They were respectively Wanli from 'ten thousand miles'; Ruofei from the 'as if in flight'; Shuoqi from 'chilly air'; Zhaoyi from 'shines on armor'; Junzhan, a portmanteau of 'general' and 'battle'; and Niangui from 'soldiers return after ten years.'"

"No one in the Fu family is biologically related to one another; they rely on inviting outside ghosts to expand their clan. They regularly hold recruitments for the elites, requesting that the admitted members give up their original names and take on new names referenced from classical songs and poetry. The ones on the board are part of the same group and joined the Fu family at the same time." There was a note of lament in Bai Shaonan's voice. "If only they had drawn 'Song of Everlasting Regret' out of the lottery back then, they would have a ghost named Fu Shengui from 'girl's bedchamber' now."

Even ghosts biologically connected might turn on each other over power struggles, let alone ones who were completely unrelated. With two dead board members in a row, Bai Shaonan had a feeling that whoever ascended to those seats were bound to cause a big stir.

"Are you saying the murderer is someone from the Fu family?" Cui Yue blurted out as if he finally understood something. He didn't expect the Fu family dynamic to be so complicated.

Out of the corners of his eyes, Bai Shaonan caught the ghostly guard staring at him. He knew the little hotpot didn't mean anything by it, but other ghosts would feel differently. Thus, he decided to add fuel to the fire: "That's a great idea. Let's first jail all the ghosts with Fu surnames and go on from there."

The ghostly guard gave him a mental thumbs-up; it seemed he very much wanted to do the same. The house Fu Junzhan lived in was not

something burned down to him by humans but a mansion built right in the underworld. Its security was airtight. As the murderer had gotten rid of Fu Junzhan without any ghost knowing about it, the culprit was obviously someone Fu Junzhan knew.

The security camera in the residence showed no abnormalities at the entrances and exits around the time of Fu Junzhan's death, so there was no way of narrowing down the suspects. The only ones who would have any interactions with Fu Junzhan were the Fu family ghosts; all they had to do was round them all up and investigate them one by one.

Of course, the possibility of that happening would remain a pipe dream.

Since the boss made it clear he didn't want to wade into the dirty waters, Qin Feng had to step up. "I don't think the news of the threatening letter Fu Wanli received has gotten out."

"Yes. That he erased all traces of his ever being there is already enough to incite panic. And since the victim is one of the Fus, the bosses would rather die than have the contents of the letter leak." The guard realized belatedly that he'd misspoken. "Don't tell anyone about this."

"Can you find out when exactly the letter was sent out?" Qin Feng asked.

"For now, we've deduced that he sent it only a couple days before the murder, but we don't have any evidence. Just to be safe, if Mr. Cui Yue receives any similar mail in the future, please notify us right away to increase your security," the guard said solemnly.

"The letter was sent to me, okay?" Bai Shaonan interjected.

The talk concluded with Cui Yue's yawns, and as the ghostly guard was a conscientious one, he took his leave without prompting. Qin Feng stayed while Cui Yue was herded back to bed.

Naturally, "back to bed" meant back to Bai Shaonan's room. Cui Yue's own bedroom was heartlessly overlooked by both ghosts.

When Bai Shaonan came downstairs, the expressionless Qin Feng was in the middle of deleting a nude picture he'd just received.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing." Qin Feng put his phone away. "You need me for something?"

This time, Bai Shaonan sat down where he could see the hallway to ensure there would be no eavesdroppers. He then told the story of Cui Yue's nightmare.

Qin Feng was quiet for a while. "Do you think that he's connected to the Fus somehow?"

"I have no idea. I just think there's something about me in his subconscious, but that's impossible…" Bai Shaonan said in a low voice.

"Is that cultivator dead?" Qin Feng asked.

Bai Shaonan nodded. "I snuffed him after seriously wounding him. He could only end up like Fu Wanli."

"But there are certain parts of your body that we never found," Qin Feng said after a pause.

Bai Shaonan didn't answer. He knew what Qin Feng was insinuating, but he didn't want to respond.

Qin Feng sighed at Bai Shaonan's evasiveness. "So what do you want to do? You asked me to stay, so you must've already made a decision."

As he expected, Bai Shaonan said, "The ghostly guards were derelict in their duty the moment the little hotpot ingested that chocolate. I want them to accompany him on a trip to a certain university as recompense. I'll be going too, of course."

Bai Shaonan thought it necessary to check out the place in Cui Yue's dream. He also wanted to find out more about that father and son, though finding them only based on the name "xiao-Lan" was like searching for a needle in a haystack. They needed more time for that.

Qin Feng analyzed the possibility in his mind, then produced a document from his bag. “You forgot about this. This is the list of names for your next mission. You won’t be able to go, so I’ll accompany Cui Yue and the guards.”

“All right, I’d feel better if you were there,” said Bai Shaonan.

“The PIGS have a field trip to Wenshu University coming up. With a little meddling, we can add Cui Yue to the list so his jaunts to the human realm won’t draw unwanted attention,” said Qin Feng.

Bai Shaonan peered at the list of names for his mission. “All right. I’ll try my best to lead these people in that direction. That way I can come find you once I’m done.”

By the time Cui Yue opened his eyes again, it was already half past eight in the evening.

Fortunately, he didn’t have class tonight or he would have been late for sure getting up at this hour.

He turned his head and shifted his gaze from the ceiling to the handsome face beside him.

Bai Shaonan faced him. His eyes, usually full of affection, were shut so he looked a little more mellow than usual. The fierceness with which he faced Fu Zhaoyi the other day was almost like a dream.

Cui Yue noticed that Bai Shaonan intentionally left some space between them and was even wearing pajamas. It made him feel guilty, thinking that he’d misunderstood Bai Shaonan.

How truly fortunate he was to have a ghost like this in love with him—it was like a godsend.

However, if he knew Bai Shaonan had actually left space between them to suppress the urge to strip down both ghosts to sleep in the nude, his impression of Bai Shaonan surely would have shifted from gentleghost to

pervert. Perhaps, similarly, his gift from the gods would feel more like a stinky gift from a dog.

As Cui Yue's thoughts were flying all over the place, his gaze remained on the ghost beside him. Bai Shaonan was always a light sleeper and had already woken up when he felt he was being watched. But as Cui Yue's stare persisted, he couldn't help but open his eyes.

"Trying to stare at me in secret, hm?"

Caught in the act, panic flashed across Cui Yue's face. His first instinct was to deny everything, except Bai Shaonan had already said the truth out loud. As he hesitated, he suddenly recalled toothpaste commercials that warned against morning breath, so he quickly retreated into the covers, with only his nose and above still exposed.

"No… no, I'm not."

Before he had gone to sleep, Bai Shaonan's scent had still felt so unfamiliar, but mere hours later, it was all already a matter of fact to him. It made him feel at ease.

Bai Shaonan's eyes glinted with a smile. He was besotted with the little hotpot's bashful reaction, and the way the ghostling acted like a youth facing his first love. However, he didn't continue his teasing. They were lying together in the same bed; any more adorable behavior from Cui Yue, and he'd have trouble holding himself back.

"No sleeping in, little hotpot." Bai Shaonan smiled.

Cui Yue puffed up his cheeks in protest—he just woke up, okay? Despite the thought, he still got up obediently while quietly rebutting, "Aren't you doing it too."

Bai Shaonan arched his brow and answered, "Hm? What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything!" Cui Yue replied immediately, not expecting Bai Shaonan to hear his little murmurs.

Bai Shaonan watched in amusement as Cui Yue dashed out of the room, and finally couldn't help bursting into laughter.

The enamored little hotpot really was adorable. He couldn't wait to make him his own.

At the dinner table, the two ghosts enjoyed an unhurried meal of delivery from the golden arches of hell, while tacitly avoiding the topic of Bai Shaonan's impending lateness for work.

"I heard your program has a field trip to the human realm coming up?" Bai Shaonan asked nonchalantly.

"Yes, led by Braid Girl. Her presentation was really good, I thought it was very helpful," Cui Yue quickly replied.

"You want to go?" Bai Shaonan didn't miss the hopefulness in Cui Yue's eyes. If the little hotpot was interested to begin with, he wouldn't have to spend much energy convincing the ghostling to sign up.

"I can't. Didn't you say the ghostly guards can't go up there?" Cui Yue smiled, but Bai Shaonan could see the hint of bitterness.

"If you want to go, I can personally talk to them about it." Bai Shaonan coughed, puffing himself up. "After all, I don't want my students to miss out on any opportunity to learn."

"Really?" Cui Yue's eyes practically sparkled.

"Really." Bai Shaonan smiled. "You can go sign up first. Worse comes to worst, Qin Feng can go with you, then it'll be completely safe."

Thanks to Bai Shaonan's nepotism, Cui Yue successfully got through the application process to go on the field trip. Ultimately, even Cao Zhongnan managed to get in.

Braid Girl received the notice but showed no surprise when her formerly ten-student team suddenly had an addition of five ghostly guards and one secretary to the dean. She simply pretended they were invisible and continued her instructions for the after-school outing.

She first took them to the university campus, where they interacted up close with the other malevolent spirits who resided there. After threatening

some poor students into burning a whole feast for them, Braid Girl gave them their assignments.

"Since we've gone over so much theory, it's time to put it into practice. The malevolent spirits around here did me a favor today and are staying in so you ghosts have this space to perform. You have to scare off at least one person."

Having said this, Braid Girl stepped back and gave the floor to them. The ten students exchanged glances with each other before finally and slowly dispersing. Cui Yue was about to ask if Cao Zhongnan wanted to partner up, but the other ghost's eyes were locked on some point in space, never giving him a look back.

"Did you hear what I said, Cao B?"

"Mhm… hmm? Oh. Yes, yeah."

"Then is what I just said okay?"

"… What did you just say?"

Cui Yue followed Cao Zhongnan's gaze and saw what he was staring at, except there was nothing special about five ghostly guards and Qin Feng. He couldn't understand why Cao Zhongnan was so transfixed. In an effort to be heard, Cui Yue finally moved himself to stand in Cao Zhongnan's field of vision. "Just be honest if you don't want to be with me. I'm not the kind of ghost to keep badgering."

"Oh, no, you better be the kind of ghost who badgers nonstop. Malevolent spirits have to be able to stalk and harass to be effectively scary," Cao Zhongnan instinctively corrected him before finally turning his attention back to Cui Yue. "You were talking about partnering up? Of course we can."

In the end, Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan decided to carry out their attack at an intersection. One of them would draw the person over and scare them off into a smaller side road, after which the person would be

terrorized again by the other ghost waiting for them in the middle of the road.

This was the so-called "one chicken, two ways" method. First, they could save time looking for targets of their terror. Second, splitting the work this way guaranteed that Cao Zhongnan would complete his assignment, since based on Cui Yue's previous performances, the ghostling was worried that he would drag Cao Zhongnan down.

Cao Zhongnan didn't ask how his partner planned to carry out the terrorizing. He was the first one up, so by the time their target went to Cui Yue, they would already be frightened. Cui Yue wouldn't need to do very much. In fact, Cao Zhongnan's challenge was to think of a good strategy to ensure the person could be scared twice in a row.

When it was deep into the night, Cao Zhongnan went off to guide the target to the side road, while Cui Yue was ordered to stay put and not go anywhere.

Cui Yue sat on a branch and stared off into space, during which time Qin Feng came over in an attempt to get some information out of him. "Have you remembered anything?"

"Remembered what?" Cui Yue was confused.

"Bai Shaonan said you had a nightmare related to Wenshu University," said Qin Feng. He'd been paying close attention to Cui Yue's every move since enrollment, yet he still hadn't discovered anything remotely off about the ghost.

"Oh? It's just a bad dream. I'm not scared anymore." Thinking that Qin Feng was worried he was still traumatized, Cui Yue even flashed him a grin.

Qin Feng quietly turned away. That wasn't at all what he was trying to say. He wondered how Cui Yue's brain was structured—how could he so thoroughly misinterpret Qin Feng's words?

It was then that Qin Feng's phone rang. He picked up without even checking the caller ID, but after the initial "hello," an anxious voice reported

news that abruptly changed his whole demeanor.

Bai Shaonan had been ambushed during his mission. He was severely injured and was now in a coma. Bai Qinghe was trying to save him, but it didn't look good.

Qin Feng's eyes grew chilly. He had personally vetted all of the targets on that list. None of them were nearly as powerful as Bai Shaonan. How did they manage to take him down?

He recalled the last few missions, and how Bai Shaonan often returned with injuries. At this point, if Qin Feng still assumed those were coincidences, then he was no better than Cui Yue, if not worse.

Whether they be human or ghost, whoever dared lift a finger against Bai Shaonan had to get permission from Qin Feng first!

"Cui Yue, there's an emergency situation back on campus. I have to go back now. Even with ghostly guards nearby, make sure to still be careful. Don't let your guard down." Qin Feng was impatient to go and see Bai Shaonan, and naturally gave up on the task of babysitting.

"No problem, you go on." Cui Yue also wanted Qin Feng to hurry off. The formidable ghost looked icy, but it was the aura he emitted that inspired a fear from deep within Cui Yue's heart.

Turned out, when Qin Feng the Great was furious, he was truly frightening. No wonder he sat at the top of the Ghoul Chart.

After Qin Feng left, Cui Yue could finally breathe properly again—no, he was already dead; he didn't need to breathe.

Cui Yue lingered for a little longer before he received Cao Zhongnan's message informing him that the fish had taken the bait. He took in a deep breath, slapped his cheeks in an effort to pump himself up, and prepared to welcome the target's arrival.

Knowing the university had a reputation for its academics, Cui Yue decided to strike from the culture angle for the purpose of blending in, and so he adopted the persona of a genteel malevolent spirit.

Heh heh. He appeared to be daydreaming by the side of the road, but in actuality, his mind was spinning furiously as he recited the lines he would eventually deliver to terrorize the victim.

The target was a slightly overweight male student. The plaid shirt he wore gave away his identity as a STEM bro. As Cui Yue saw the student run up in a nervous panic, he wasted no time making the streetlamps blink out temporarily. He stood in the center of the road with his back to the young man and made himself appear before the target's eyes.

The student had just run into something terrifying, and now scared out of his wits, he was about to race back to his dorm. Unfortunately, his legs were short and slow. Just as he was about to run out of breath, the streetlamps blinked out with a *pop*. The only thing lighting the path now were dapples of moonlight that shone through the canopy. A vague outline of a shadow was up ahead, bringing his heart all the way up to his throat. What was special about this day, he thought, that the supernatural was coming on so strong?

This was the only path available to him. The student stilled his steps and wanted to turn back, but the thought of what he'd just experienced behind him made his scalp tingle. He faced death if he kept going and death if he went back. The student gritted his teeth. The figure in front of him hadn't yet made a move; perhaps it considered itself too good for him, he thought. As long as he tried his darndest to pretend to not see it, to not give any reactions, and to charge straight through, he could still make it back to the dorms scot-free.

The student trained his eyes on the ground immediately before him, planning to make it through that way. As he passed Cui Yue, he held in his already bated breath, as though that would prevent him from being discovered. He might not have been looking at Cui Yue, but his ears were pricked up, so naturally, he picked up the murmurs of an indistinct male voice.

"Raise a cup to the moon so bright… one shadow becomes three with the light… if the moon does not know to drink… Best make merry while there is spring… The moon lingers as I sing…"

The student paused in confusion as he slowed his steps. "Drinking Alone beneath the Moonlight"? A ghost was here on campus to recite a poem by Li Bai?

Speaking of which, there was some moonlight today, so the ghost had certainly chosen an appropriate verse.

As the student started to calm down, his mind wandered. He even felt embarrassed for his whole semester of all play, no work. If even a ghost was more cultured than he was, then how the hell could he waste his days of being a human, and how the hell could he waste being a *college student*? Perhaps the ghost couldn't stand to see him like this and had come out here to warn him to focus on his studies?

Cui Yue was immersed in his little world of poetry recital. Not only did he miss the target's reaction, but when he got to "the shadows scatter with my dance," he abruptly forgot the next line.

"The shadows scatter with my dance… The shadows scatter with my dance… The shadows scatter with my dance…"

"Sharing the fun while we're awake."

"Oh, thanks."

Cui Yue answered reflexively, but realized too late the crucial question: *Who* had just spoken to remind him of the next line? Was it the STEM bro?

It surprised him that the STEM bro knew poetry, and even better than he did. But wait, where did the STEM bro go?

Cui Yue's eyes were wide as he searched and finally found a receding figure far down the road. He guessed it was that student.

He walked away, just like that? Left the scene with steady steps?

His imagined conclusion of the events—of the student being scared out of his mind and yelling "Mommy where are you?"—did not come to pass.

Cui Yue contemplated in anguish. Where did he go wrong? It was clearly a great plan. Or was it because he hadn't memorized "Drinking Alone beneath the Moonlight" well enough?

Cui Yue sighed. There was only ten minutes left until the deadline Braid Girl had given them. He had no time to look for another target. It would appear that he'd failed again. He turned around and saw that Cao Zhongnan, who had witnessed the whole debacle, was watching him and looked rather conflicted. The unspoken "I kind of understand how Doctor Bai feels now" was delivered straight to Cui Yue's communication array.

"Cao B." Cui Yue's expression was just as complex as his partner's. Cao Zhongnan hadn't asked how Cui Yue planned to carry out his scare, so the ghostling hadn't asked either. Hence, he was completely unaware of Cao Zhongnan's plan. "Why are you wearing a wig and a low-cut V-neck dress?"

"Why do you think that guy came over here, if not because of my beauty and sexiness?" Cao Zhongnan wiggled his brows.

The makeup someone had burned to Cao Zhongnan a while ago "by mistake" filtered into Cao Yue's mind, along with the realization that it most certainly had been a lie. Now he was sure Cao B must have requested the cosmetics.

"Just now, I lifted up my dress to show him what's underneath, and there's three faces in there—scared him half to death," Cao Zhongnan continued.

Cui Yue's eyes remained locked on Cao Zhongnan's chest. "Cao B, stuff something in the chest area next time you wear women's clothing. You're too flat compared to a woman, and flat chests just don't go well with a deep V-neck look."

"And here I was trying to have a serious conversation with you. Stop ogling my chest!" Cao Zhongnan swatted Cui Yue on the side of the head. "Isn't Qin Feng the Great with you? Where did he go?"

"He got called away."

"Oh."

"Time's almost up, we should go find Braid Girl," Cui Yue said, noticing Cao Zhongnan's unusual despondency.

"Mm-hmm."

"What I mean to say is you should hurry up and change out of those clothes so you don't scare Braid Girl."

"Hey, what's that supposed to mean?"

Cui Yue thought that this exercise would end with Braid Girl giving him a look of disappointment, but reality seemed to always be the opposite of his imagination. In a stroke of bad luck, they came upon a very strange group of people wearing cultivator clothing on the way back. The group consisted of Chinese people and others from various Asian countries, as well as several non-Asians.

Logically speaking, students would rather cross-dress than gallivant as Taoist cultivators for no good reason. Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan exchanged a look as suspicion arose in their minds.

Let's go a different way.

Okay.

The two ghosts reached a consensus via eye contact. Just as Cui Yue turned, he glimpsed out of the corner of his eye a brochure in one man's hand. On it in big letters were "Taoism International Academic Seminar: Further Proliferating Grandmaster Lü's Ideas" and "Held by the Wenshu University Taoism Cultural Research Center."

What the hell was the Taoism Cultural Research Center doing hosting such a dangerous seminar! It was positively an act of war!

Cui Yue was so terrified that he forgot how to float and almost fell from midair onto the cultivators' heads. Unfortunately, that one instant was all it took for one of the group to turn his sharp gaze in Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan's direction, as he proclaimed loudly, "There's something impure that way!"

Immediately, voices of consensus rang out and jabbered on for some time.

"Professor He is right, indeed. There's something impure here."

"Since we've gathered here on such a rare occasion, it'll make a good memory for us all to exorcize a ghost together. Doctor Chen, didn't you mention earlier that you recently acquired a new talisman? Why not give it a try?"

"We can't leave these things in the school to disturb the students!"

Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue saw fear in each other's eyes. They had neglected to remember that, aside from themselves, there were also several ghostly guards following behind Cui Yue. It was no wonder that they were discovered.

Two little malevolent spirits running into a bunch of cultivators with professor and doctor titles in a dark alley. It was easy to imagine how it would end.

"Are these people professors or athletes? How can they have so much stamina? They're not letting up on the chase at all," Cao Zhongnan yelled as he flew. Fortunately, these cultivators had some years on them and weren't following as closely as the monster at the casino hotel.

Cui Yue looked back. The scholars' eager faces were full of joy, as though they were embarking on an adventurous side quest that popped up in the middle of a fun outing.

And as for those ghostly guards who were supposed to protect them? Sorry. They couldn't handle the talisman-happy energy of the zealots and had long ago joined the escape gang.

The ghosts scarcely knew where they were flying in their panic, and by the time they came to that realization, they were already in the middle of the wilderness, among the trees. The university was built next to a mountain, so the ghosts had naturally avoided the main roads to evade

capture, rushing headfirst into whatever foliage they saw. The result, of course, was that they were lost.

Cui Yue surveyed the dense forest before them, and felt a pang at his temples as well as the area around his eyes. Broken images flashed into his mind as though all this had already happened but also not.

The forest suddenly disappeared before his eyes, and a layer of green covered his field of vision, making it impossible for him to see. He couldn't move, though he could hear words of a sweet and intimate nature unsuitable for children.

"Want more… Harder…"

"No problem."

The scene changed again. This time he was looking at an ashy white ceiling. It took Cui Yue a few moments to realize he'd been restrained onto an operation table. The man beside him was repeatedly checking the readings on a piece of equipment as he spoke in a tone as though comforting a child.

"Daddy, what's his name?" a younger, male voice asked.

"He doesn't have a name."

"Then I want to give him one!"

"All right, go ahead."

"Hmm, let's call him xiao-Bai!"

"Xiao-Lan, how mean of you."

"Hee hee, that's how you know I'm your son!"

Darkness set in again. Cui Yue couldn't see anything, though it was no longer the voices of the father and son in his ears but instead only the son speaking to him in a resentful tone.

"Daddy doesn't want me anymore."

"How can Daddy not want me?"

"Daddy, you're the only one I've got."

"Daddy… come with me to hell."

The despair in the voice made Cui Yue's heart clench, but that was quickly followed by a shrill scream louder than anything he'd ever heard.

"Can you hear me, a-Yue?! Hurry and wake up, a-Yue! Cui Yue! Cui Yue!"

Cui Yue opened his eyes and found that he'd successfully escaped from the hallucination but was currently slumped over the shoulder of a ghostly guard like a sack of rice. The sound of wind rushed past his ears as the forest rapidly flew by his eyes. Oh, and there was another sack of rice: Cao Zhongnan.

"A-Yue, you're awake! Are you all right?" Cao Zhongnan yelled. He was a distance away from Cui Yue. His voice must have grown hoarse trying to wake the ghostling up solely with his shouting.

"Okay, he's awake. You can shut up now," said the deadpan ghostly guard carrying Cao Zhongnan. Clearly he was the primary victim of Cao Zhongnan's noise pollution.

Cui Yue blinked as he took some time to understand the current situation. They had only been at the perimeter of the forest earlier, so why were they now running through it? Had those professors followed them here without regard for their own safety?

"There was a crazy guy in that group who jumped down the guard rails to chase us. We had no choice but to run," the ghostly guard carrying Cui Yue jumped at the opportunity to explain in case Cao Zhongnan felt like using his loud voice again.

"Speaking of which, can't we just take their souls away?" said one of the ghostly guards without a rice sack.

"His name isn't on the list. You wanna risk it?" The ghostly guard carrying the Cao Zhongnan rice sack glared harshly at the speaker.

"It's not like you're Bai… You're just an ordinary ghostly guard. You can't just take the souls of living people without permission," the ghostly guard carrying the Cui Yue rice sack also joined in.

“So, what you’re saying is you guys can’t actually protect me?” Cui Yue thought it sounded worse by the second. Since they couldn’t attack a living person unprompted, what if someone made up their mind to exterminate him? Like now, for example. It would seem that aside from being able to run away faster, these so-called bodyguards were practically useless.

The guards fell silent. Cui Yue’s words were right on target and hit them exactly where it hurt. If they were malevolent spirits, they could devise tactics against these cultivators, but they were ghostly guards who had to abide by a professional code. They couldn’t do that.

It was then that a sinister male voice sounded from behind them: “I found you, little ghosties. Where are you going to run now?”

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09

Around the same time that Cui Yue and his group of ghosts ran into the cultivators, Qin Feng had just made his way back to the underworld at a merciless speed. He arrived in time to see an exhausted Bai Qinghe on the way out of the operation room after the completed surgery.

"How's Bai Shaonan doing?"

"Not bad. I've already reconnected his body. It's only the old wounds that are a bit tricky." Bai Qinghe gave Qin Feng a nasty look. "As Shaonan's right-hand ghost, not only did you not advise him to come see me when he was injured, you even helped fix him in secret. Are you *trying* to kill him?"

If Bai Qinghe was in the mood to yell at him, it meant that Bai Shaonan's condition wasn't critical. "Then, as his father, shouldn't you reflect on what you've done to make Bai Shaonan distance himself from you?" Qin Feng retorted as he felt a rush of relief.

Qin Feng ignored Bai Qinghe's ongoing tirade behind him as he turned and calmly floated into the operation room. Bai Shaonan had already performed a disappearing act on the operation table and was about to give the hospital an encore.

"Where are you going?"

"What are you doing here?"

Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan spoke up at the same time. Watching Bai Shaonan nimbly dress himself, Qin Feng suddenly had a bad feeling. "What injury brought you to the hospital?"

Bai Shaonan was about to yell at Qin Feng for running back and leaving Cui Yue on his own, but hearing this question, he also knew that something was wrong. "My feet got chopped off just as I happened to run into Father; he was adamant about bringing me back here… What did you hear?"

Qin Feng's expression darkened. "I got a call saying you had an accident, was mortally wounded, and was about to disappear from this earth."

"Bullshit." Bai Shaonan's expression wasn't much better. "The little hotpot's in danger."

This round of drawing the tiger out of its mountain specifically targeted Qin Feng where it hurt. The schemer knew very well how Qin Feng would react upon hearing that something had happened to Bai Shaonan. He'd been played like a fiddle.

Qin Feng would drop anything and everything, even if it meant sacrificing his own fiendish life, in order to save Bai Shaonan. Forsaking the chance to save the guy in favor of protecting his most important ghost? Qin Feng would never do such a thing.

Bai Shaonan was everything.

Qin Feng flew out of the room without a word. If he could float back to the underworld in such a short time, doing the reverse naturally wouldn't take long. Bai Shaonan followed behind him but pulled out his phone to call Ghostly Guard Junior on the way.

"Yes, yes, yes, go open my mailbox. The password is 4454… Go check if there's any new mail…"

"Oh, please, Qin Feng opens it for me too. Hurry up… Anything?"

"Netherworld Technological Center? Not that one. Check again… No, not that one. Why would I tell you to check for mail from the Malevolence Energy Generation Research Institute?"

"Did you find it?"

“Unmarked white envelope? Hurry up and open it. Read it to me… Lovingly He? You’re sure it’s Lovingly He? Is the target a Fu ghost or Cui Yue?”

“Mm-hmm, okay, got it. Thanks.”

Bai Shaonan got off the phone and said to Qin Feng, “The target is little hotpot. How long until we get there?”

“Six minutes, five if you can go faster.”

“You know where he is?”

“I bought him his phone—I installed GPS tracking on it.”

In the forest, rice sack Cui Yue just narrowly avoided the cultivator’s freezing talisman by a millimeter.

To call him a Taoist cultivator was an insult to the whole field. After all, no ghostly guard had ever seen a maniac with such a sallow face and glinting red eyes become a cultivator. It was even a wonder how he had made it into an academic seminar. And as for that bunch of useless and bored professors who treated the ghosts as a way of working off their post-meal bloat, they all received quite a scare when an unfamiliar member among them suddenly broke rank and leapt off the cliff. It was then that they finally sobered up and called the police.

Of course, all of this was irrelevant to Cui Yue at present. At this moment, he wanted more than anything to become deaf since the voice of their hunter was unendurable to humans and ghosts alike.

“Where are you going, little ghosties? Come out and play with big brother.

“Where are you going to go? Big brother has found you heh heh heh heh heh…

“Come on let’s play, play, play. Big brother will chop your heads off, ha ha ha ha ha ha…

"Big brother is *so* happy ha ha ha. When I find you, I'll yank your legs off! You've all been bad kiddies!"

This guy is most definitely out of his mind, Cui Yue thought. He called himself "big brother" but clearly sounded like an old geezer. But wait, maybe he wasn't out of his mind? Maybe he was just sick?

A barrage of curses with the intent to kill flew directly at them from behind. The guard took a wide turn and evaded them, but in the process, his elbow knocked into the rice sack's chest. Distracted, Cui Yue got the wind knocked out of him and squirmed reflexively from the pain, causing the guard to suddenly lose balance. Together, the two ghosts tumbled wretchedly onto the ground.

"A-Yue!"

Cao Zhongnan's pupils contracted in concern as he instinctively tried to get down to help Cui Yue, but he was held tightly in place by the ghostly guard who was carrying him. It was only a few moments since the fall, and the cultivator had already caught up to them, only three steps behind.

At this point, the ghostly guards prepared themselves for attack as they attempted to suppress the man's advance with their ghostly energy. They knew very well that if they exchanged blows, they would at best be sent off to reincarnate and, at worst, be wiped completely off the earth. This was why they only posed as though they were about to attack but, in reality, were planning to hold their defense and look for chances to escape.

The guard who'd tumbled to the ground deftly picked up Cui Yue again, preparing to dash off at any moment.

An immense spread of ghostly energy filled the air, forcing the man to still his steps. However, just because he stopped moving didn't mean he was content to shut his mouth.

"One, two, three, four… Hahahahaha, so many little dudes to play with. Big brother is so happy…"

The man threw his head back and laughed. Next, with a swish of his robe, beams of razor-sharp curses shot out and cascaded down upon them. These weren't ordinary talismans, but ones that could pierce through both ethereal and corporeal souls. That was how cruel this man was.

The guards moved side to side as they quickly retreated. The curses hit the tree trunks with loud bangs, and ominous blue flames immediately erupted from the wood. The innocent trees blocked much of the attack, but it was as though the curses had eyes. Everywhere the ghosts went, the curses seemed to follow.

The rice sacks Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue grabbed tightly onto the clothes on the guards' backs, twisting their upper bodies side to side as they evaded the bombardment. Since the ghostly guards were also dodging side to side, the whole process of running away felt like they were on a roller coaster. Their heads violently shook and Cui Yue quickly felt dizzy from all the swaying. On top of losing all sense of direction, now he couldn't even see their perilous surroundings clearly. In simple terms, he was motion sick.

"A-Yue, be careful!"

Cao Zhongnan could see out of the corners of his eyes that Cui Yue had slowed down, and was about to collide headfirst into a curse. Unfortunately, he himself was so busy with dodging that he wouldn't be able to get there in time to save the other ghost. Just as he thought tragedy was about to play out before his eyes, a strong gale blew in from up head, knocking down all the talismans at their tails.

"These aren't cultivator talismans; they're curses from the ghost realm. I understand why the students wouldn't notice, but you guys can't tell the difference either? The ghostly guards really do get worse with every generation."

The mocking came from ahead, where Qin Feng himself stood after arriving at the scene right on time.

A horrific scream sounded from behind them. Qin Feng looked unfazed as he cocked his head and indicated for the guards to set Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan down. "Have you two been hurt? Non-psychologically, I mean."

Finally on the ground, Cui Yue looked over his fully intact limbs and said, "I'm fine."

Cao Zhongnan's eyes never left Qin Feng from the moment the latter showed up. "M-Me… too."

Cui Yue wanted to talk to Qin Feng about what happened, but an external force suddenly lifted him up from behind. He cried out in surprise and was about to thrash around, when he smelled a scent that was now more than familiar to him. It was then that he realized this "attacker" was someone he knew.

It was Bai Shaonan. Bai Shaonan had come to save him.

The dean was already in a mood because his little hotpot had been attacked again, and pulled the ghostling into his arms in a fit of temper. Cui Yue initially stiffened, but as soon as he realized who was holding him, he quickly relaxed and silently accepted the embrace.

One second Bai Shaonan was giving off yin energy as if it grew on trees, and the next his mood was suddenly elevated; even the corners of his lips curved up. At that moment, he looked almost like a rooster that had courted successfully.

The ghostly guards felt humiliated that they required Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan to show up and save them, yet they couldn't just let the matter rest as it was either, so one among them reluctantly asked, "That man was dealt with?"

Rooster Bai nodded. "Still has half a life left, but he's pretty much on his way down. Speaking of which, can you guys not sense that he's half human and half ghost? Since he's half ghost, you totally could've attacked instead of running away this whole time."

One guard touched his nose in embarrassment. They were first hunted down by a horde of old professors who didn't act their age, so he'd assumed the man was also one of them. But he was too humiliated to say this out loud.

"Never mind. You guys delegate, leave one behind to clean up, and the rest… go back to whatever you were doing." Now that he had the little hotpot in his arms, Bai Shaonan only wanted to hurry and take the ghostling back. He hadn't heard a peep from Cui Yue this whole time, so the ghostling had to be very scared. He needed to bring the ghost back to bed and console him with soothing words or, if possible, with his body as well.

"We can't go back." Qin Feng glanced at Cao Zhongnan, who had quietly floated up close to them. He didn't chase the ghost away, his silence serving as permission for the student to stay nearby. "We were speeding too much on our way here, and not to mention didn't apply for a permit to come up. We could get ticketed for illegal realm-crossing on top of speed-drifting.

Bai Shaonan froze. There were speed limits in place for floating in the underworld. If he went back now, the ghostly guards at the Department of Transportation would most certainly be lined up in a row waiting to arrest him.

"We have to submit a delayed application to the Realm-Crossing Bureau, then explain the urgent nature of the situation to the Department of Transportation to request a dismissal of the arrest," said Qin Feng.

The ghostly guards had demonstrated their ineptitude twice in a row now, so the safest solution was to keep Cui Yue close. Even though illegal realm-crossing plus speed-drifting would only warrant a few days of jail time, that was enough to put Cui Yue in danger once more. The only way out was to stay here for now. Unlike the guards, malevolent spirits were on principle allowed to attack any human they liked at will, as long as they could evade the exorcism of experts, that is.

Thus, Bai Shaonan took Cui Yue, and Cao Zhongnan followed Qin Feng. The four ghosts left the scene without a second look and, like lovers, moved into the couple's suites of a five-star hotel.

Frankly, they had plenty of matters to follow up on. For example: who had called Qin Feng, what the connection between the half-human half-ghost and "Lovingly He" was, etcetera. However, Bai Shaonan pushed it all down. At that moment, nothing was as urgent as addressing his little hotpot's frightened little heart.

Cui Yue was carried into the room like a bride. When they were in the forest, he'd already wanted to quietly break free of Bai Shaonan's hold, but he didn't expect it to become tighter as time went on. Unless he spoke up to tell the ghost to let him go, there was no way to break free. There was no light in the forest, so the other ghosts couldn't see what he and Bai Shaonan were doing, but once he made a sound, it would surely draw all the attention to himself.

No. Definitely not. He couldn't let the guards find out the secret that Bai Shaonan had a crush on him. Cui Yue was absolutely certain that Bai Shaonan was holding him for fear of losing him—it was an act of emotional release.

The only issue was that Cui Yue was used to thinking from the human point of view, and so overlooked the fact that ghosts had night vision. When Bai Shaonan held Cui Yue in his arms like a little puppy, the ghostly guards, Cao Zhongnan, and Qin Feng had stood right by the whole time, witnessing everything.

During the time Cui Yue appeared to have a lot on his mind but was really absentminded, Bai Shaonan played a little trick to force the original guests of the room to call the lobby and request a room change. After some back-and-forth, the guests switched to a different floor and the space quieted down.

"Everything is fine now, little hotpot. With me here, you don't need to be scared." Bai Shaonan gently set Cui Yue onto the bed and prepared to begin his grand "consolation strategy."

Cui Yue's behavior could never be predicted by another ghost. Hearing Bai Shaonan's words, he snapped out of his trance. The confused look on his little face clearly said, "What nonsense are you spouting now," even as his mouth said, "I'm not scared."

He wasn't lying. The instant Bai Shaonan appeared, Cui Yue had felt a sudden and tremendous relief. Even when Qin Feng saved them, there was still a lingering fear at the bottom of his mind that wouldn't go away. However, when he was surrounded by the familiar chilly scent of Bai Shaonan once more, he was suddenly not scared of anything.

As long as Bai Shaonan was beside him, he was at ease.

Bai Shaonan blinked. Oh no. Judging by little hotpot's composed tone of voice, he really had broken free of the terror. Then what was Bai Shaonan supposed to do now to make everything that wasn't supposed to happen, happen?

At Bai Shaonan's silence, Cui Yue turned around and turned the tables, consoling him instead. "Don't worry. The bodyguards did a great job protecting me. Really, I didn't get hurt."

Except his feelings when they'd carried him like a rice sack.

Cui Yue thought that since they were talking, he might as well tell the whole story. As Bai Shaonan listened, all of his romantic notions were squashed, and his attention focused on the hallucinations Cui Yue described.

A father and son with an unusual relationship who considered the bestowment of the surname Bai "mean." Bai Shaonan wasn't being overly sensitive—in the entire ghost realm, the only significant "Bai"s were Bai Qinghe and himself.

He had no recollection of the father and son, but Bai Shaonan was well acquainted with the experience of being bound to a table, unable to move

while his body was checked by equipment.

"What's wrong?" Cui Yue noticed the stern change to Bai Shaonan's expression as he had talked. He pondered for a moment and automatically filed the reaction under "fear." He patted Bai Shaonan's hand and said, "It's all over. Don't be scared."

Bai Shaonan was speechless. *How did you come to the conclusion that* I *was scared*?

Cui Yue innocently looked back at him. The dean's expression had changed so drastically; how could it not be fear?

After suffering Cui Yue's stare for a good long while, Bai Shaonan finally admitted defeat under the ghostling's pure gaze. "Fine, I *am* a little scared."

Cui Yue knew it! He was in such a panic earlier while running for his life that no wonder Bai Shaonan was as well after listening to his verbal recollection. Bai Shaonan most definitely had some latent fears about losing him. As a lackey, he couldn't let his master worry over him, and it'd be even better if he could show off his resilient heart and how easily he could shrug this whole experience off. To this end, he intentionally changed the subject. "I'm going to fail my practical exercise. Do you think Braid Girl will yell at me?"

Bai Shaonan paused. He just now remembered that the little hotpot had come here on a field trip. Since he'd taken Cui Yue away, Braid Girl might have assumed two of her students had gone into reincarnation.

"What did you do for your practical exercise?" Bai Shaonan knew Cui Yue's history and decided to get some more information first.

Cui Yue blushed as he awkwardly relayed the story of his failure at scaring the student. The corner of Bai Shaonan's eye twitched as he listened. He didn't consider using ancient poetry such a bad idea, but reciting "Drinking Alone beneath the Moonlight" under those circumstances would only make the target think he'd run into a weirdo instead of a ghost.

"You could've recited something different, or even not shown yourself and used only your voice." Bai Shaonan sighed, telling himself repeatedly that he was the one who brought Cui Yue back, and that he had to teach the ghost even if it brought him to his knees. "If you're going to show yourself, then don't recite a Tang dynasty poem straight from a primary school textbook."

"But I was afraid if I went with something deeper that he wouldn't understand. I was originally planning to recite 'The Mountain Spirit,' since this is a city on the mountain, and that makes me a ghost in the mountain city, which makes me a mountain spirit," Cui Yue said, naively.

"Please, leave 'The Mountain Spirit' alone. Qu Yuan would cry if he knew." Bai Shaonan glanced at the ocean view outside the window, and since the sky was still dark, he said, "Come with me. I'll take you to see Braid Girl so she doesn't worry."

Of course, Bai Shaonan wasn't simply planning on delivering Cui Yue to Braid Girl. Preferential treatment notwithstanding, as a dean, he couldn't stand by to see Cui Yue hand in such an assignment.

The two ghosts went back to campus and found Braid Girl in the staff dormitory applying a mask to her face. Bai Shaonan explained to her where the two students had gone, but Braid Girl was in no condition to speak. The whole time, she was reclined on a sofa, only waving a hand to indicate that she understood. The cultivator professors had raised such a ruckus that she'd been convinced the two missing students had been forcibly crossed over. She had even prepared to write up a report to send to U of U Northern Hell Campus.

After that, Bai Shaonan brought Cui Yue outside the student dorms with the threat that if he didn't succeed in scaring someone, he wasn't allowed to go back.

"But I haven't memorized 'The Mountain Spirit' yet…" Cui Yue said.

Bai Shaonan couldn't help rolling his eyes, "Little hotpot, please give up on 'The Mountain Spirit.' Can't you devise a simpler plan?"

Reprimanded, Cui Yue bowed his head sadly. "But I want to do something related to the university."

Bai Shaonan kept himself from informing Cui Yue that "Drinking Alone beneath the Moonlight" had nothing to do with the university anyway and instead offered, "It's not wrong to follow that idea, but sometimes you have to know your own limits. See, didn't Braid Girl go viral from just her braid?"

Cui Yue answered only with a "Mm."

Bai Shaonan sighed, bending down to press his forehead against Cui Yue's until his face was reflected in the other ghost's eyes. "You can do it. Didn't you do really well last time with the umbrella? Hm?"

Cui Yue's face flushed. Feeling the touch to his forehead inconveniently led to the memory of the goodnight kiss from earlier. What was worse, Bai Shaonan was holding Cui Yue's shoulder in place to make sure his words of encouragement would make their way into the little hotpot's ears.

"I-I got it!" Cui Yue didn't even realize he was yelling. He was too preoccupied with the notion that his face would turn as red as a watermelon if they kept on with this skin contact.

Cui Yue's reaction was not lost on Bai Shaonan. On the surface, he acted as though he hadn't seen anything but, inside, he secretly laughed to himself. The little hotpot was so innocent that something like this already overwhelmed him; if he went in for a full kiss, the ghostling might just combust on the spot.

That wouldn't be his desired outcome. Right now, he was slowly cooking the frog. He wanted the little hotpot to acclimate one degree at a time.

After Cui Yue was released, he immediately put some distance between himself and Bai Shaonan, even giving the other ghost an indignant glare.

Stinky Bai Shaonan had once again pressed up against him without warning, Cui Yue thought. If it wasn't for his own grace in forgiving the other ghost's denseness for having a crush on Cui Yue and not realizing, he would surely tell Qin Feng about this.

Too bad Bai Shaonan didn't know what Cui Yue was thinking. If he did, he would burst out laughing like a cat that got its way, then lock Cui Yue in his arms and kiss him while saying, "Here is your warning."

University students are all night owls, so an unlucky male student made his way toward the dorms before the blush even had a chance to fade from Cui Yue's cheeks. Bai Shaonan, seeing the opportunity, gestured for Cui Yue to focus and get ready to go.

Meanwhile, Cui Yue's mind was completely empty. He hadn't had a chance to think of something before he was rudely interrupted by Bai Shaonan earlier. "Drinking Alone beneath the Moonlight" belonged in his short-term memory, but if he was asked to recite the next line of "one shadow becomes three with the light," he might just burst out with "birds' cries startle when we loathe to part" from Du Fu's "Spring Outlook" instead.

As the male student drew nearer, Cui Yue became more and more nervous. His brain also short-circuited as it was filled with images of Bai Shaonan, the sound of Bai Shaonan's voice, and the sensation of Bai Shaonan's touch pressed against his forehead.

"... sometimes you have to know your own limits. See, didn't Braid Girl go viral from just her braid?"

Cui Yue had a sudden stroke of enlightenment. Without thinking, he charged forward, transformed into a visible human figure, and ran straight into the male student's arms.

The student was playing with his phone when suddenly a dark shadow rushed toward him. All at once, he forgot to react and instead stood frozen in place. By the time he came back to his senses, a young guy slight in stature had squeezed himself into the student's embrace with his head down.

"Y-You okay?" The student reached out to push the guy away. What the hell was this? He wasn't gay. A dude throwing himself into his arms wouldn't make his heart flutter in the slightest.

Unfortunately, it was as if the young guy anticipated his reaction, as he clenched the student's sleeve and started to sob without even looking up. "Why don't you like me?"

"Who are you? Did you mistake me for someone else?" the student said, surprised.

The young guy still didn't lift his head as he continued, "I'm not mistaken. You clearly recognize that girl but won't recognize me. You don't like me at all!"

The student saw that the young guy was starting to throw a tantrum, and used some more force in an attempt to pull him off. "Mister, I don't even know what you're talking about! Look up and see for yourself. You! Got! The! Wrong! Person!"

"The wrong person?" The young man suddenly released the student, but still stood blocking the way as his voice turned resentful. "Every one of you is heartless! You'll recognize the girls and pretend you don't remember the boys."

The student realized that something was wrong. Just as he was about to turn and run, the young guy's pale hand suddenly reached out and grabbed his wrist. The young guy looked up and stared into the student's eyes, his voice ringing hollow, "You all know to speak of Braid Girl's name but can't manage to say my name… Do you dislike me that much?"

"AHHHH—"

There was nothing on the young guy's face, only a blank spread of skin. The student let out a high shriek, yanked his hand free, and bolted off without a second glance. He wished he had a rocket booster installed on his butt so that he could run from the scene at light speed.

Cui Yue returned his facial features, looking back contently at the dean after successfully scaring the student away. There was a gleam in his eyes, which Bai Shaonan would assume was the sparkle of confidence but which Qin Feng would describe as "a dog waiting for its master's praise after fetching the bone."

Bai Shaonan glanced at the dorms, where commotion was brewing, and pulled Cui Yue away without a word. After all, the ghostling had successfully scared off a human, which meant he'd fulfilled his goal and was allowed to go back to the hotel.

Cui Yue was basking in the joy of success, but Bai Shaonan's silence the whole way made him gradually feel uneasy. He wondered if he'd done something wrong.

Bai Shaonan did not speak because he was fuming.

Cui Yue's success at scaring the human was certainly commendable, but when Bai Shaonan saw Cui Yue throwing himself into the male student's arms, all he could feel was a pang of jealousy. When he saw Cui Yue grabbing the student's hand and not letting go, his jealousy had already fermented into a pot of vinegar.

As a professional malevolent spirit, Bai Shaonan understood that a certain amount of bodily contact was effective in furthering the fear. But Cui Yue had never expressed such forwardness toward him, so what right did that guy have to be the little hotpot's first?!

And Cui Yue too! If the ghostling had told him of the plan ahead of time, Bai Shaonan would surely have asked for a rehearsal!

The more he thought about it, the more jealous he felt.

Back at the hotel, Bai Shaonan immediately started his scolding. "You shouldn't have hugged him. A certain degree of bodily contact is okay, but large areas of contact will taint you with yang energy. How are malevolent spirits with yang energy supposed to scare people?"

Cui Yue nodded vehemently. After being sidelined for so long on the way back, his joy had long been crowded out by anxiety. All he wanted was for Bai Shaonan to speak, to say something, whether it was to reprimand him or yell.

Bai Shaonan had thought up a whole slew of rebukes based on moral reasons, planning in his mind that he would take at least an hour to get through it all. However, when he saw Cui Yue's expression that said, "I was wrong. I won't do it anymore. I'll reflect on my mistakes," he gradually lost steam. At the end, he only scoffed coldly before sitting down on the bed to continue his fuming.

"Go sit in the corner and reflect." Bai Shaonan turned his face away. Cui Yue hadn't even realized his "mistake." No matter how Bai Shaonan scolded the ghostling, he was merely talking to the wind.

Cui Yue obediently floated into the corner. On the outside, he seemed to be self-reflecting, but he was actually thinking about the fact that this was the second time he and Bai Shaonan were staying at a hotel together.

Speaking of hotels… he remembered the position Cao Zhongnan had explained to him the other day. Ahem. He was blushing just thinking about it.

But wait, hold on. The extremely dense Cui Yue suddenly looked up and glanced toward Bai Shaonan's intentionally turned back. He had a flash of realization—could it be the reason Bai Shaonan wouldn't stop chastising him about hugging the student was because he was jealous?

Ha. How the tables have turned, Bai Shaonan.

The corners of Cui Yue's mouth curved up, and his mood instantly brightened. He even felt like throwing his head back in laughter. The reputed master of Bai manor was not only jealous of an anonymous university student but had even pretended to be righteous as he scolded Cui Yue about being tainted by yang energy.

He quietly moved away from the corner. Now with a jealousy filter on, he could clearly see that Bai Shaonan's left cheek obviously said, "I'm unhappy," whereas his right cheek said, "I want a hug too."

This realization filled Cui Yue with a sense of supremacy. There was nothing more exciting than the feeling of being able to sway the Master Bai's emotions. Cui Yue bowed his head to obscure the grin he couldn't manage to suppress as the urge to give Bai Shaonan a hug grew in him.

Nevertheless, Bai Shaonan rushed here to save *him* specifically, so it would be a little cold not to even give him a hug. Cui Yue ignored the flush on his cheeks as he gently shook out his hands, practicing a little too late the way to hug a ghost. Then, he floated up, and before Bai Shaonan could open his mouth, spread his arms wide to circle them around Bai Shaonan's waist.

Cui Yue was so focused on giving the other ghost a hug that he didn't realize how vicious he'd looked throughout the whole process. Without an ounce of gentleness, the bear hug not only left Bai Shaonan unmoved, but it also startled him, as though he were the prey of a brown bear.

"Fucking h—" Bai Shaonan cussed as he jumped. "What are you trying to do, little hotpot!"

He knew that Cui Yue was quietly approaching him. To be honest, he was intentionally allowing it to happen, just so he could see what dumb thing Cui Yue was going to come up with.

Yes, Bai Shaonan had concluded early on that Cui Yue was here to do something dumb.

"I-I wanted to give you a thank-you hug…" Cui Yue was too embarrassed to continue. He had come on too strong and not only had he failed to grant Bai Shaonan's wish but he had also startled the ghost into spewing profanity. This was a definite failure.

He let go of Bai Shaonan and bowed his head in dejection. He already lacked talent when it came to scaring people, and now he could see that the

same was true of his consolation skills.

Bai Shaonan's heart softened upon hearing Cui Yue's words. At first, he thought Cui Yue was practicing his assassination skills, since after all, he'd never seen anyone who hugged with such ferocity. However, since that student received a frontal hug from Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan got an assassination-style hug from the back, he'd consider it even.

"Come around to the front." Bai Shaonan's face was blank and his tone flat, but inside he'd already transformed into a feral wolf howling at the moon. It was the first time Cui Yue had initiated a hug. Even though there was large room for improvement, he would certainly not let this opportunity slip away so easily.

Cui Yue moved obediently to Bai Shaonan's front and nervously waited for his sentence.

The dean sat up straight, then coughed, saying, "Again."

Cui Yue blinked. Again what?

"Didn't you want to hug me? I'm giving you another chance at it."

Sitting there with his lofty anticipation of gratitude, Bai Shaonan made Cui Yue's eye twitch. *He* was the one who wanted a hug, so how did it get twisted around?

But when he met Bai Shaonan's gaze, which practically shouted "Come here already!" Cui Yue sighed to himself and gave in as he floated up and wrapped his arms around Bai Shaonan.

In Bai Shaonan's imagination, Cui Yue was supposed to lean into his embrace like a timid little bird while he held the ghostling in his arms. But in reality, the birdbrained Cui Yue floated into the air, grabbed Bai Shaonan's head, and tried to press it against his own chest.

Bai Shaonan was rendered speechless. The little hotpot's social awareness was lower than he thought. If it could be quantified, it would definitely be below negative one hundred.

“Hey, little hotpot, where did you get the idea that in order to hug, you need to rise into the air first?”

“But if I don’t, I won’t be tall enough to reach your head.”

“Who said that you have to hold my head in a hug?”

“You don’t like your head being touched…? Did I mess up your hair? I’m sorry.”

It was never about the hair!

Bai Shaonan rolled his eyes. He couldn’t rely on Cui Yue; if he wanted to get something from this, he had to do it himself. With one hand, he dragged Cui Yue down from the air and, with the other, patted his own waist. “Again. Put your hands on either side.”

Cui Yue blinked. He’d never had someone asking for a hug also request a specific position. Though, if that was what Bai Shaonan wanted, he’d just have to satisfy him.

It took a long time, but finally, the two ghosts successfully embraced. Bai Shaonan went as far as to wipe all the earlier failed attempts from his memory, telling himself that this was the first time the little hotpot had initiated and requested a hug.

Cui Yue’s body was very soft and huggable. He had the refreshing scent unique to new ghosts, unlike old ghosts like him, who were smothered in yin energy. Bai Shaonan lowered his gaze. When Cui Yue’s eyes were closed, the soft complexion of his face, his slightly upturned lips, and the intentionally relaxed muscles in his arms all came together to form a sweet and docile impression that tugged on Bai Shaonan’s heartstrings. He felt as though there were popping sounds inside his body, as something broke bit by bit.

He’d already made up his mind to give the little hotpot time to acclimate, but when the ghostling’s every gesture exuded reliance and love for him, why should he keep holding back?

Suddenly, Bai Shaonan couldn’t think of a reason to.

Cui Yue figured the hug had been long enough and started to draw back. However, Bai Shaonan refused to let go of this opportunity, so he tightened his grip and pretended to be caught off balance by Cui Yue's squirming. The two ghosts fell onto the bed and rolled a whole turn before ending in a position with Bai Shaonan on top and Cui Yue on the bottom.

Their eyes met, and Bai Shaonan's dark pupils reflected Cui Yue's bright red cheeks. Bai Shaonan suddenly thought that the most beautiful red spider lilies in hell were no match against the little hotpot's bashful flush.

"Dean Bai… Y-You get up first…" Cui Yue stammered. They were pressed up against each other in a hotel suite—Cui Yue knew that if they didn't move apart now, something was bound to happen.

"Shaonan," Bai Shaonan corrected him. They weren't on campus, and he didn't have this specific kink. He didn't mind it normally, but to call him Dean Bai in bed—was the little hotpot trying to turn him off?

"Shaonan, can—can you… get up?" Cui Yue obediently changed his form of address. If Bai Shaonan would get up, he wouldn't even mind calling the dean "little darling Nannan."

"Why get up?" Bai Shaonan deliberately lowered his voice, luring him in with a charming tenor. "Is this not good?"

"Not good." Cui Yue closed his eyes and shook his head violently. His butt wasn't ready. *Sob.*

Bai Shaonan was surprisingly amused by Cui Yue's reaction. His low chuckle swirled around Cui Yue's head, slowly numbing his nerves.

"If you don't try, how would you know it's not good?" The seductive voice once again invited Cui Yue to take the plunge. Bai Shaonan leaned in beside the ghostling's ear and blew on a beet-red earlobe in jest, feeling the gentle quiver coming from the younger ghost's body.

Bai Shaonan's eyes darkened as he swiped his tongue lightly across his own lips. In this moment, he didn't want to think about anything. Taking Cui Yue for himself was now an instinctual need.

There probably was no heat inside any ghost's body, but Cui Yue felt like he was so hot that he would burst out into flames. Every movement from Bai Shaonan was fuel to the fire, stoking his flames into a blaze.

"Open your eyes, little hotpot."

He thought Bai Shaonan would be looking at him with a shameless grin, but as he opened his eyes to see the intent expression before him, Cui Yue suddenly forgot what he was doing. He stared blankly at the ghost in front of him and couldn't say a single word.

He might be dense, but he wasn't blind. He could see the intense emotions in Bai Shaonan's eyes: the fondness, the passion, and the desire for him.

He couldn't believe a ghost as superior as Bai Shaonan would lose control for a rookie like himself.

An indescribable excitement poured out from his heart. Cui Yue belatedly remembered that even though Bai Shaonan had always been flirtatious, he'd never truly done anything that disrespected him.

He once again realized that Bai Shaonan must really like him.

If it was inevitable, then it didn't really matter when he agreed. Besides, in this very moment, whether it was Bai Shaonan who stirred his emotions or his sloshing brain, Cui Yue didn't want to run anymore.

At almost the same instant that Cui Yue made up his mind, Bai Shaonan observed the minuscule change in the ghostling's countenance. The little hotpot was still looking shy and uneasy, but there was a hint of firm resolution in his eyes as well as… what looked like sacrificial determination.

Am I really that scary? Bai Shaonan thought to himself.

As he expected, the little hotpot's idea of love remained at a middle-school level. Bai Shaonan pursed his lips to prevent himself from laughing out loud. He gently brushed his hand over Cui Yue's cheeks, his wayward fingers lingering around the lips, enticing the ghostling to open up and let him in.

"Let's give it a try, okay?"

Bai Shaonan's low murmurs were still echoing in Cui Yue's mind; he didn't have the capacity to wonder what it meant to "give it a try." The entirety of his attention was focused on Bai Shaonan's mischievous fingers. They were soft and gentle touches, but it felt like waves of attacks from archers attempting to shoot down the flag at the top of the city wall to force him to surrender.

"… Okay?" Bai Shaonan was speaking again. A haze came over Cui Yue's eyes, and he wanted instinctively to repeat the words in his ears.

"Not okay."

An icy voice suddenly rang out from behind them. The two ghosts who were about to further communicate their intimacy in bed were cruelly snapped back to reality. Bai Shaonan looked back just as Cui Yue lifted a foot. An agonized cry was heard in the room before Bai Shaonan was booted cruelly off the bed and onto the floor.

"I understand that you might have urges, but can you two deal with the serious matters before giving in?" Qin Feng floated to the sofa, not the least bit of discomfiture on his face. Based on his cool and blank expression, he might as well have merely walked in on Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan having a normal chat.

"What serious matters?" Cui Yue immediately asked. As long as the focus was on anything other than what he and Bai Shaonan were doing, he could even discuss solar particles with Qin Feng.

"Witness statements." Qin Feng pointed at the door. "A ghostly guard is here to take our statements. Cao Zhongnan and I are done; just waiting for you two now."

"I-I'll go right away!" Cui Yue was anxious to respond. And as for the aggrieved gaze thrown at him by a certain ghost… Well, he maintained that he was too dense to notice.

"Out the door to your left, both the guard and Cao Zhongnan are…" Cui Yue had swiftly fled the scene before Qin Feng even finished his sentence.

As soon as Cui Yue left, Bai Shaonan started to nitpick; everything Qin Feng did looked wrong. "You go out with your clothes all wrinkly like this?"

"It got wrinkled in the room earlier. It was smooth when I came up here," Qin Feng answered without blinking.

"Hmph! As if anyone will believe that," Bai Shaonan scoffed.

Qin Feng ignored the mini-tantrum even though it was entirely his doing. He didn't feel a single shred of guilt about it, however, and even went straight to business as he took out his phone. "I got the newest threatening letter from Ghostly Guard Junior. Take a look."

Dearest Dean Bai,

I remember the way you looked at me that day, like the brightest star in the night sky.

I remember your voice when you called to me that day, like the most beautiful string in the world.

I remember those lips when you spoke to me that day, their shape so distinct, it was intoxicating.

I said that Cui Yue was unsuitable for you, but you refused to believe me, you silly goose. You need me, and I long for you; we are the most compatible pair.

Lovingly,

He

Bai Shaonan looked wordlessly at the letter. The creepy stalker was bad enough, but what did they get out of calling him a "silly goose"?

Pardon, but he actually had a real silly goose by his side named Cui Yue. However much he liked the ghostling, he couldn't bear for their intellect to be compared.

"Hey, silly goose, do you think that half-human half-ghost from earlier is 'Lovingly He'?" Qin Feng could see exactly what Bai Shaonan was annoyed with, but he didn't mind twisting the knife.

"Screw you." Bai Shaonan's eye twitched. "I showed myself in front of that guy and he didn't even react. No way that he's 'Lovingly He.' Besides, his ghostly energy was smeared onto his soul by force; that's not something a living human could do. He's either an accomplice, or he's been used."

"Don't go around saying that last line out loud, otherwise the guards will take this chance to attach themselves to us again. If they can't figure it out for themselves, it's their incompetence," Qin Feng advised him. With two Fu family ghosts dead in a row, they needed to tread ever so carefully to protect Cui Yue and prevent him from being taken away by the Fus.

"I know." Bai Shaonan nodded, then said casually, "How long will we be in the human domain for?"

"Five days at least." Qin Feng had a headache just thinking about it. Five days—how much work could be done in five days?

"Five days…" Bai Shaonan stroked his chin. Five days of time together without interruptions from other ghosts would be enough for him to nail the little hotpot, right?

"Don't worry. A lot of work can be done remotely nowadays." Qin Feng could see at a glance what Bai Shaonan was up to. "You didn't bring Cui Yue up here to play, remember?"

Bai Shaonan scowled. This was what he'd been subconsciously avoiding, but going against Qin Feng, and for the sake of self-preservation, he had no choice but to let it out, even if to force himself to face the cruel reality. After relaying the details of Cui Yue's hallucinations, he asked quietly, "Qin Feng, I wish more than anything that it isn't true. But do you think it's possible?"

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After Cui Yue finished recording his statement, he and the guard both headed back to Bai Shaonan's room since the guard was still missing the dean's statement.

From the corner of his eyes, Qin Feng spotted Cui Yue's upper body about to cross into the room and immediately stopped what he was saying before making up an excuse and leaving. As soon as he returned to his own room, Cao Zhongnan was already on him, the infatuation in his eyes so intense that even Cui Yue would be able to see how he felt about Qin Feng.

"Lord Qin Feng… Now that there are no ghosts around to disturb us, can we… continue?"

After several encounters, Qin Feng was used to Cao Zhongnan suddenly and inexplicably going into heat whenever they saw each other. Normally, he didn't mind continuing like this, but having just heard about Cui Yue's hallucinations from Bai Shaonan, he smelled a strong conspiracy brewing beneath the surface. If his boss refused to come to terms with reality, then he had no choice but to put in more work behind the scenes.

"Go play by yourself in the corner, I have work to do." Qin Feng pushed away the ghost trying to cling to him. He was wary of Cao Zhongnan's sudden "friendliness," but before he could figure out the other ghost's objective, it was better to keep him around in this manner than to have him make trouble where Qin Feng couldn't see.

Since they were just fooling around, Qin Feng never showed Cao Zhongnan any cordiality. It was always Cao Zhongnan who clung to him. His schemes and calculations made it unlikely for his cold and cunning personality to be looped into any games, but he forgot that the coldest ice was bound to melt upon contact with fire.

Like now.

Qin Feng's whole mind was so focused on Cui Yue's hallucination that he didn't realize he was actually giving Cao Zhongnan a reason for his unavailability. Before, he'd only say, "Fuck off," before kicking the ghost out of the room.

Cao Zhongnan astutely noticed this difference. His lips curved into a triumphant smile. He patted his face to deter his flirtatious wiles before slowly approaching Qin Feng again. "Are you investigating the attack on us?"

Qin Feng once again swatted away Cao Zhongnan's errant hand. "If you know, then go to sleep and leave me alone."

"Speaking of which, a-Yue passed out as soon as we entered the forest, but he kept mumbling something the whole time. Don't tell me he has some kind of plant phobia?" Cao Zhongnan said, letting out a sensual groan.

"What did he say?" asked Qin Feng, pausing what he was doing.

"Hm? Let me think…" Cao Zhongnan cocked his head in thought. A while later, he finally spoke up. "Something like, 'take off my hand for sanding,' and 'rebuild the body,' and I thought I heard the dean's name too."

Qin Feng shot a probing gaze at Cao Zhongnan as he contemplated the hidden meaning behind these words. Cao Zhongnan seemed to enjoy being appraised like this. Just as his eyes were about to mist over, Qin Feng finally spoke up again. "Really?"

"Really. If I heard correctly."

Qin Feng was quiet again, looking away as he fell into deep thought.

Cast to the side, Cao Zhongnan couldn't stand the boredom. "Say, were a-Yue and I attacked because we're students at U of U NHC?" he asked as he wrapped his arms around Qin Feng's waist from the back as if he was a spoiled child.

"Why would you think that?"

"Didn't two members of the board die? When it comes to the Fus, word tends to get out even if the news doesn't mention it."

"When did you guys get involved with the Fus?"

"I never." Cao Zhongnan gently bit the back of Qin Feng's ear. "The Fus only ever recruit ghosts who already have solid accomplishments. Maybe the dead board members offended some other ghost before joining the Fu family, and this is payback? And then maybe they even took out their anger on the students at U of U NHC. A-Yue and I are so unlucky."

"Don't run your mouth." Again, Qin Feng swatted Cao Zhongnan away, even as his eyes glinted. Right. How could he have forgotten to look into the glorious histories of the board members before they joined the Fu family?

Cao Zhongnan's every attempt so far had failed. This time, he set his sights on Qin Feng's pants. He deftly undid the belt, pulled down the zipper, and murmured as he leaned in, "I was so good and… helped with your investigation, Lord Qin Feng… now play with me…"

The ghostly guard quickly left the hotel after talking with Bai Shaonan, leaving only Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan in the room, staring at each other.

The sensual atmosphere from earlier had long since dissipated. Cui Yue now felt wide awake and sober, his eyes also wide open to the situation. He maintained that, this time, he wouldn't let Bai Shaonan get away with it again.

Had he almost submitted just now? No, no no. That was only a misunderstanding, Cui Yue thought mindlessly. He was reading a magazine,

pretending that he wasn't blushing, but was unaware that he was holding it upside down.

Bai Shaonan stood leaning against the door. His glum mood from his previous conversation with the ghostly guard was all gone. With amusement, he watched Cui Yue, who refused to accept the truth. Of course Bai Shaonan wanted to continue where they left off, but since the other party already made his feelings clear, he had no choice but to sigh and suppress the urge inside him.

After all, they still had five more days. *We have lots of time, little hotpot.*

"You like reading gossip mags, little hotpot?" Bai Shaonan tilted his head back and said to Cui Yue, who was trying his hardest to become one with the sofa.

"Of course not!" Cui Yue slapped the magazine down before realizing that he'd overreacted. His eyes swiveled around the room and settled on the bathroom. He quickly blurted, "If y-you want to read magazines, then go ahead… I'm going to take a shower."

Bai Shaonan's eyes darkened. He wished he could open up Cui Yue's brain to see what it was made of. A shower? How could he bring up the word "shower" in front of a ghost who was trying to devour him?

Cui Yue didn't get any reply from Bai Shaonan, so he gathered his courage and said again, "Or do you want to go first?"

Fighting the urge to roll his eyes, Bai Shaonan faked a smile and said, "Little hotpot, did you forget what happened just now?"

Cui Yue didn't miss the wrath at the corner of Bai Shaonan's lips. He wondered in confusion why the ghost would get mad at him taking a shower, but outwardly, he gave an obedient answer. "The ghostly guards came to take our statements…!"

As he realized what Bai Shaonan was insinuating, he wanted nothing more than to erupt into a mushroom cloud on the spot. Cui Yue swore that he hadn't meant anything like *that*!

Bai Shaonan floated up to Cui Yue and gently caressed the ghostling's cheeks, murmuring in a low voice, "Is that an invitation, little hotpot?"

Cui Yue turned his face to dodge Bai Shaonan's hand, and as he hesitated over whether it'd be rude to simply float away, Bai Shaonan's positively demonic voice sounded yet again.

"Not only can I shower with you, I'll happily engage in other activities too."

"Pervert! Water's an important resource. We shouldn't waste it, or food!" Cui Yue couldn't help but blurt out. No longer concerned with politeness, he quickly dashed into the bathroom, away from Bai Shaonan.

Bai Shaonan blinked. He stood frozen for a while but finally laughed out loud. Water, an important resource? That was what the little hotpot focused on? Did he forget that as ghosts, they could easily go through walls, and that a mere bathroom door was no obstacle at all?

But quickly, Bai Shaonan's laugh turned bitter. If possible, he really didn't want to face the bloody truth behind Cui Yue's origin.

How great would it be if Cui Yue could be an ordinary ghost?

But that was all just wishful thinking.

The vibration from his phone interrupted Bai Shaonan's bitter thoughts. He picked it up, and the caller ID instantly put him in a bad mood.

"You better actually have a reason to call me, Fu Zhaoyi."

"Dean Bai, I received news of your short stay in the human domain. If that's the case, perhaps you can take care of this target along the way before you come back." Fu Zhaoyi's voice was as calm as though he'd just finished talking about breakfast—classic total disregard for human lives. "The target's name is Li Xizhi; male, fifty-six years old; currently attending a Taoist academic conference. You have to attack before he publishes his essay."

"Mr. Fu Zhaoyi, you seem to forget that a command can only be given with the agreement of five members of the board. I will not abide by you

going over the board's head like this." Bai Shaonan's voice was just as cold. Unlike Fu Zhaoyi's indifference, his was a coldness that shut others out.

"We'll be holding a meeting later. I'm just giving you a heads-up first."

"Two of the board members died, you can't send a command with only four members."

"One of the things we're discussing today is Fu Wanli's substitute. If possible, we'll fill Fu Junzhan's seat as well."

"You've all discussed this seven times, and still there's no consensus."

"We will this time. You'll receive an official notice in three hours, Dean Bai."

"I don't give a crap whether he publishes or not. Regardless, I'll only work once I receive the formal notice. You think you can give me a call and order me to work? Who do you think you are?" Having said his piece, Bai Shaonan ended the call and turned off his phone, not caring whether Fu Zhaoyi was still talking on the other end.

Cui Yue dodged into the bathroom but still worried that Bai Shaonan would barge in. Even in a five-star hotel, he didn't dare to fully enjoy the experience and sped through his shower. When he floated out of the bathroom, he poked his head out first to see what Bai Shaonan was doing.

To his surprise, Bai Shaonan was sitting at the desk playing with his phone. No, based on that intent expression, he was probably looking at work?

It really was tiring being a dean—all that work and he still had to come save an incompetent student. Cui Yue felt sheepish but at the same time a little pleased. Bai Shaonan's feelings for him must be genuine. Why else would the dean be so anxious about his safety?

"Little hotpot, I have to go out for a while later. You'll go stay in Qin Feng's room," Bai Shaonan said without lifting his head. He might have hung up on Fu Zhaoyi, but he still did as he was told and started his research on Li Xizhi.

If Fu Zhaoyi dared to call him, it meant that the ghost was very confident that Li Xizhi wouldn't live for long. The formal notice would probably arrive with the condition of acting before the essay could be published. If he really planned on starting the investigation after receiving the notice, he'd certainly not have enough time to finish his mission.

He would never give the Fu family the chance to take Cui Yue away from him with the excuse of neglection of duty, or in the name of protection, to interrogate Cui Yue about his connection with "Lovingly He."

Cui Yue noticed that Bai Shaonan didn't even glance at him, and guessed that he must be dealing with something important. However, he hesitated about going to Qin Feng's room.

Cao Zhongnan had secretly told him before going back to their rooms that he planned to take advantage of these days to spend some quality time with Qin Feng and to cultivate his affections. Once they got back to the underworld, Cao Zhongnan planned to confess his feelings.

"Sometimes, affection starts from physical contact. Do you understand, a-Yue?" Cao Zhongnan had given him a knowing smile, signaling for him to not interfere with his plan.

At first, Cui Yue thought that it was a long shot for Cao Zhongnan and Qin Feng, but if his bro had a target to pursue, Cui Yue obviously wouldn't get in the way. Though internally he was thinking, "I'll give you a nice funeral," he'd promised he wouldn't bother them even if aliens descended.

"Little hotpot?" Bai Shaonan noticed that Cui Yue hadn't responded and so paused what he was doing and turned.

"Hm? Sure, sure, got it," Cui Yue immediately agreed, though there was reluctance in his eyes. Interfering with a friend's love life would result in scorched balls.

Bai Shaonan didn't see the ghostling's reluctance as he waved his hand, indicating that was all. Cui Yue landed on the sofa in a state of conflict. He contemplated the possibility of convincing Bai Shaonan to let him stay in

this room alone. In the end, he came to a miserable conclusion: Unless another planet crashed into Earth, Bai Shaonan would absolutely make him go over there. No, if another planet really was crashing into Earth, Bai Shaonan would be even more adamant about making him go.

Which meant he had to prepare himself to interrupt Cao Zhongnan under the threat of scorched balls.

With despair on his face, Cui Yue floated back into the bedroom and flopped onto the bed, splaying his limbs. His eyes wandered all over the room in desperation, when suddenly he spotted the ring of keys Bai Shaonan had casually set down earlier.

A brave idea dawned in his mind. He abruptly sat up—that was it! He could simply possess an item of Bai Shaonan's and go with him.

He remembered that Bai Shaonan once said it was extremely difficult to detect the possession of another ghost's object, even for experts. And once he'd possessed the item, he wouldn't hear what was happening outside, though he would still sense if they were moving forward or staying in place. He'd still be able to respect Bai Shaonan's privacy.

Yes. If he went along with Bai Shaonan, his balls would be safe.

A wave of excitement washed over him as he almost teared up from the impending turn of events. If only he knew what severe consequences awaited him for tagging along with Bai Shaonan, he would take out a lighter and burn his own balls off himself with no help from Cao Zhongnan.

It was three hours later when Bai Shaonan finally received the notice. He tutted, accepted the documents personally delivered to him by Fu Zhaoyi's secretary, and immediately kicked the ghost out of the room. He cursed the Fu family in his mind for giving Fu Zhaoyi such unchallenged control over the school's board of directors.

In fact, the one who most often butted heads with Fu Zhaoyi in the board meetings had been Fu Wanli. The former must be having a great time these days.

Bai Shaonan briefly skimmed over the document and focused his attention on the five signatures at the bottom. It appeared that they'd only chosen one replacement.

Fu Niaojue? As in "absent birds"?

From the Tang poem "River Snow"?

Bai Shaonan stroked his chin, wondering if he should do some meddling to elevate another ghost to take Fu Junzhan's place, one who would go head-to-head with Fu Zhaoyi. If only the board could occupy themselves with in-fighting, they'd have no energy to bother Bai Shaonan.

Then again, that wasn't an urgent matter. He would get rid of Li Xizhi first before anything else.

Bai Shaonan circled the suite and didn't manage to find Cui Yue, so he assumed the ghostling must have gone over to Qin Feng's room while he was concentrated on work. Thinking the little hotpot had been so considerate not to disturb him, Bai Shaonan packed up everything he needed and set off for the eighth floor in the light of dawn.

It was a stroke of luck that Li Xizhi happened to be staying in the same hotel, which saved him a commute. Even if he had full confidence in Qin Feng, it still couldn't compare to guarding the little hotpot in person.

When Bai Shaonan arrived at the eighth-floor hotel room, Li Xizhi was in the shower. Bai Shaonan was not interested in the wrinkly old man's body, so he graciously decided to snoop around the room first. Spotting a few tomes of ancient texts on a desk, he walked over and peered at them. He was surprised to find that they all had to do with demonic possession and couldn't help but flip through a few of them. The half-human half-ghost creature from yesterday could probably count as demonic possession.

He was so engrossed in the texts that he completely forgot about Li Xizhi's presence. Only when his target charged out of the bathroom did he remember the reason he came.

"What ghost dares to make trouble here!"

Bai Shaonan slowly set the book down, and snapped his fingers so the human could see him before saying, "Professor Li, my name is Bai Shaonan. I hereby greet you on behalf of Judge Yanluo's court."

If Bai Shaonan wasn't wearing a white T-shirt with the slogan "My perverseness lets me get intimately acquainted with you people," perhaps Li Xizhi would actually believe Bai Shaonan to be a messenger from Judge Yanluo's court. But now, he only assumed it was some random no-name ghost who had come to challenge him.

"Hmph! Spouting bullshit and still trying to fake it. Watch this old man disintegrate you!"

Several talismans shot out from between Li Xizhi's fingers. Bai Shaonan was not the least bit deterred. A flick of his finger and the talismans dispersed into thin air without ever having touched him.

Li Xizhi was stunned. Being interrupted from his shower left him in a sour mood, so the talismans were the most powerful ones he had, but this ghoul had neutralized them by simply lifting a finger?

"Don't be so hasty, Professor Li, and let me finish first. The independent committee under Judge Yanluo has decided that you are someone who will disrupt the equilibrium of the world. To ensure the smooth turning of the wheel of destiny, Judge Yanluo's court has appointed yours truly to come right the wrongs. Simply put, I'm here to take your life."

Bai Shaonan said all this with a shallow smile on his face, his gentle demeanor in stark contrast with his words. Li Xizhi was still inclined to think a malicious ghost was playing a prank on him, but Bai Shaonan's earnestness after he spoke, along with his barely hidden animosity, all pointed to the possibility that this might be real.

He really was here to annihilate Li Xizhi to the point the professor wouldn't even have a chance at reincarnation.

"Bullshit! A mere ghoul walking the human domain dares speak of Judge Yanluo!"

And as for what happened next, Cui Yue had no clue. To be quite honest, he almost wished to become a key sprite from this day forth, attached to the keys for all of eternity, never to appear as himself again.

For whatever reason, the moment Bai Shaonan sat down to read those tomes, the keys in his pocket were somehow shifted, and suddenly Cui Yue could hear the sounds around him. However, after Professor Li's last insult at Bai Shaonan, his signal was abruptly cut off again, and he couldn't hear anything anymore.

Cui Yue knew then that he'd been exposed—Bai Shaonan had wanted him to hear.

He thought that Bai Shaonan was, at most, going to attend a meeting. Never would he have guessed the other ghost would engage in this type of work outside of his identity as a dean. Now he knew why the Bai family, small as it was, could challenge the large Fu clan. It turned out Bai Shaonan had the Judge's court at his back, the most solid backer in all of the ghost realm.

By the time Bai Shaonan separated Cui Yue from his keys, Li Xizhi was lying peacefully on his bed as though he'd passed away in his sleep. Cui Yue locked his eyes on the floor, not daring to look anywhere else. He'd already heard something he wasn't supposed to, and if he saw anything else, Bai Shaonan might just exterminate him no matter how much he liked Cui Yue.

Bai Shaonan was first and foremost the head of the Bai family, and after that the dean of a university and a part-timer at the Judge's court. Finally, and only after everything else, he was the romance-oblivious ghost with a crush on Cui Yue. Such was Cui Yue's logic after being brainwashed by the hottest new palace-harem drama in hell, and internalizing the empress's line: "He is the ruler of a country first, and my husband second. He has the world in his heart, while I am only an insignificant speck of dust within it."

"Let's go."

Bai Shaonan had just murdered someone, yet he looked as calm as any other moment. Even his breathing remained steady. He shot a glance at Cui Yue, now an ostrich busy feigning ignorance, and turned to leave.

Back at their own suite, Bai Shaonan secretly let out a yawn in a corner where Cui Yue couldn't see. He lowered the shades to block out the sunlight before starting the interrogation. "Talk. Why did you come with me?"

Cui Yue cowered a little, then realized that only the truth could save him from Bai Shaonan's wrath. He repeated the words "Please forgive me, Cao B" as he stammered his confession, "I-I don't want… my balls to burn…"

A confused horror appeared in Bai Shaonan's eyes. Burnt… balls? Whose balls?

Qin Feng had threatened the little hotpot with burnt balls?

Why?

At the idea of such a cruel and unusual punishment, Bai Shaonan couldn't help but clench his lower body. He knew deep down that if Qin Feng really set his mind to it, even Bai Shaonan himself wouldn't be able to escape that fate.

At last, with the help of Cui Yue's jumbled explanation, Bai Shaonan finally sorted through the series of events. As a ghost who prioritized serious matters, Bai Shaonan made the swift decision to set aside the fact that Cui Yue had secretly followed him in favor of details about Cao Zhongnan's pledge to acquire Qin Feng.

No wonder Qin Feng's clothes were so disheveled when he dropped by earlier. So that meant that he'd already succumbed? Hee hee hee, little Qin Feng, oh, how the tables had turned.

Bai Shaonan was thrilled as he started to envision a future where Qin Feng was tied down. Could that mean that he would no longer be forced to work overtime whenever Qin Feng felt like it? He could even bring Cao

Zhongnan into the office as a student helper, see if Qin Feng dared to continue the senseless oppression!

"Dean Bai?"

Cui Yue's voice made Bai Shaonan suddenly aware that he'd started cackling out loud. Finding his manners again, the dean coughed quietly, switched back to his solemn expression from before, and focused his attention on another matter. "So, what do you think about what you heard?"

"I didn't hear anything!" Cui Yue immediately swore. Seeing Bai Shaonan frown, he added, "I was sleeping just now and never left the room; I didn't even know you were gone!"

Bai Shaonan propped up his head with one hand. Frankly, he'd only realized that Cui Yue had followed him the moment he sat down to flip through the books. He had plenty of ways to keep Cui Yue in the dark about what happened, but recalling Cui Yue's hallucinations, he changed his mind and decided to let the little hotpot in on the darker side of the Judge's court.

"Can't you tell that I let you in on it on purpose, little hotpot?" Bai Shaonan sighed.

"Huh?" Confusion surfaced on Cui Yue's face. He knew that Bai Shaonan intentionally allowed him to listen but never expected to be asked for his input on the matter. This was akin to paying off your credit card after a trip only for the bank to tell you that it wasn't enough and that you also had to submit a report of your travels.

Seeing Cui Yue's reaction, Bai Shaonan was forced to give Cui Yue three minutes to organize his thoughts. However, three minutes later, Cui Yue only managed to come up with this: "Hell is going through economic hardship. You have to work for the Judge in addition to your regular job as a dean. One ghost working two jobs suggests that it'll be difficult for me to find work as a malevolent spirit after graduation."

Bai Shaonan didn't know what to say. Very good? This was just the way students think. They could relate any subject to the job market.

"Any thoughts on the so-called disruption of the world's equilibrium?" Bai Shaonan knew that Cui Yue didn't grasp the main point, so had no choice but to guide him.

"Didn't you say that Judge Yanluo's court needs to right those wrongs, to ensure the smooth process of destiny?" Cui Yue wholly believed in Bai Shaonan's words.

"Yesterday, the ghostly guards ran all that way but didn't dare to kill, so why is it that I can?" Bai Shaonan continued.

Cui Yue paused, then asked, "Right. How come you can?"

Bai Shaonan wanted to slam his head into the wall. He started to think that forced overtime might be less torturous than explaining things to the little hotpot.

"Humans are greedy beings who like to hold power in their own hands, ignoring the plight of other living things. It's precisely because of this that they've done many things that go against heaven's will.

"The consequences of these actions always come too late. By that time, humans would have already committed too many atrocities. The disrupted equilibrium would take a long time to return to normal, so Judge Yanluo's court came up with a way to safeguard the will of heaven, or destiny.

"The Judge formed an independent committee dedicated to deliberating on the people who defy destiny. If they are determined to have disrupted the equilibrium of the world, I'm sent to resolve it. In the entire underworld, I am the only one with the special privilege to kill living beings whose names are not on the list to be taken from earth.

"Though this method of acting on behalf of destiny was given silent approval from the powers that be, the Judge still thought of it as something inappropriate to be associated with. In order to wash his hands of the matter, the Judge outsourced the task to the Fu family. The Fus were also worried about their reputation, so six hundred years ago, they built the University of the Underworld—Northern Hell Campus, shoving me and the

independent committee into it. This way, we could continue the shady business under the guise of education."

Bai Shaonan gave up on the game of question-and-answer with Cui Yue and switched to explanation mode.

Cui Yue's eyes widened. He never would have thought that being a dean was Bai Shaonan's side gig, while his actual job was with the Judge. But wait…

"Hold on, the independent committee you're talking about, is that the school…"

"That's right."

This time, Cui Yue's jaw was practically on the floor. He had no opinions on the shady dealings of the Judge's court. If their ways went against heaven's will, they would have been blighted a long time ago, never mind allowed to operate for hundreds, or even thousands of years.

His reaction was about the Fu family. The Fu-Bai conflict was complicated enough, but now he was told that, actually, they were both part of the dark side. He suddenly found himself a lackey in a gang war.

No wonder "Lovingly He" wanted to kill him. If the Fus and the Bais subsisted on a diet of regular violence, it was only normal that they used extreme measures on a daily basis.

Bai Shaonan who, in fact, did not subsist on a diet of regular violence and only carried out missions as he was given, patted Cui Yue's shoulder and said, "Why do you think I told you all this?"

Because you want me to be a gangster, Cui Yue thought. The lyrics from the theme song of *Young and Dangerous* were already playing in his mind. He was on the verge of belting them out at any second. In front of Bai Shaonan, however, he dared not do such a thing. He was sure that if he dared to sing them out loud, he'd surely be beaten to death.

"Because… you want me to know that you're doing two jobs but only earning one salary?"

Cui Yue had thought about it briefly. He was in no position to comment or critique the Judge's court and how they do their business. As for how the Fu family and the university board of directors determined the people who disrupted the equilibrium of the world, Bai Shaonan didn't really explain. He figured Bai Shaonan only wanted him to have a general idea of the situation.

As a member of the Bai family, he wanted his own lackey to get a sense of the family business; from the perspective of a suitor, who wouldn't want to show off their powerful side in front of their heart's desire? Bai Shaonan probably wanted to use this opportunity to tell him that he wasn't just a mere dean of a school.

"No. But your input is very valuable." Bai Shaonan was about to berate the ghostling when he realized that Cui Yue was right. He really was only getting one salary. That couldn't stand. He would apply for a raise as soon as they went back.

However, before he would do that, he leaned in close to Cui Yue and said grumpily, "Little hotpot, do you know now how dangerous your predicament is? You've been targeted along with those old geezers on the board, and still you followed me with no regard for your own safety."

Bai Shaonan was right. Cui Yue's actions were in total disregard for his own safety.

He'd been lucky that Li Xizhi turned out to be a weakling. If they'd run into a fanatic, even Bai Shaonan might have been trapped in a drawn-out battle. Then, if the keys had fallen out—he dreaded even thinking of the consequences.

Realizing this, Cui Yue bowed his head in shame, and quietly said, "I'm sorry."

Bai Shaonan might be on a tirade, but he could never stand to see the little hotpot looking dejected. Suddenly, he couldn't recall what his next words of beratement were. "Never mind; it wasn't your fault that you didn't

know. Next time, don't just do whatever you want. No more going off on your own."

"Understood."

"All right, that's it for this then. Go to sleep."

The fatigue on Cui Yue's face didn't escape Bai Shaonan's notice. He waved his hand, indicating for the ghostling to go to bed.

Cui Yue blinked in surprise. He didn't think that he'd be let off so easily. He stared dumbly to the left at the large bed, then to the right at Bai Shaonan, obviously a little at a loss for what to do.

"What, want me to *sleep* with you?" Bai Shaonan rapidly adjusted his mindset, needing no segue at all to go from blowing up to flirting. He emphasized the word "sleep," implying anything but.

"That's not necessary!"

Cui Yue bounced into the air as if his bottom was on fire, then flew into the bedroom like a hurricane. Just as he was about to bang the door shut poltergeist style, Bai Shaonan floated into the room through the slit in the door.

"What are you so nervous for, it's not like I'll do anything," Bai Shaonan said as he handed Cui Yue a few sheets of talismans. "Stick these on the walls and windows, this way other ghosts can't come in here while you're asleep."

Cui Yue nodded and started pasting the talismans all over. He forgot that they were in the human domain, and a ghost could emerge from any corner at any time.

"Go ahead and sleep. I have to write up a report first."

Bai Shaonan could see Cui Yue's discomfort and didn't tease the ghostling any further. He turned and left the bedroom, even thoughtfully closing the door behind him.

Cui Yue stood there and blinked. He belatedly realized that Bai Shaonan was trying to distract him from his downcast mood, while he was

so dumb as to think that Bai Shaonan was teasing him. He climbed under the covers sheepishly, saying a silent apology to Bai Shaonan in his mind.

Bai Shaonan stuck a talisman on the outside of the bedroom door before collapsing onto the couch. He pulled out his phone and sent Qin Feng a message, telling him to come over whenever he finished what he was doing.

Upon receiving the message, Qin Feng first scoffed at the "get your ass here if it doesn't hurt," then took a shower before heading over to Bai Shaonan.

"Where's Cui Yue?"

"Sleeping. I stuck a silence charm on the door. He won't be able to hear us."

Qin Feng's eye twitched. Silence charms were not talismans used in the human domain to chase away ghosts, but an underworld invention by perverted ghosts with nothing better to do. Since the paper houses burned down by descendants were not soundproof, it was easy for lovers rolling around in the sheets to disturb their neighbors. Hence, the promiscuous ghosts with an affinity for in-bed exercises developed such a talisman for soundproofing. Colloquially, it was referred to as the kinky charm.

Upon release, the talisman immediately gained notoriety across the entire underworld, and was often sold out. The fact that Bai Shaonan had something like this on hand and ready to go was incredibly suspicious.

"What do you need from me?"

"I tested the little hotpot; there's about a sixty percent chance."

"… I thought you were going to feign ignorance."

"I was, but there happened to be an opening, so I tested him." Bai Shaonan told him how Cui Yue had followed him to the mission and teased, "I didn't know you have a habit of torching balls."

Qin Feng was quiet for a moment. He didn't mind if Cui Yue thought of him as perverted; what he feared was the dumb ghost telling his good

buddy about it. What if Cao Zhongnan actually played along, taking out a lighter and telling him to go ahead? There was no limit to what the kid was into in bed, making all kinds of noises no matter what Qin Feng did. He was one hundred percent a masochist.

"How did you test it out?" Qin Feng decided to focus on serious business first, the messy stuff could wait for later.

"I laid it all out for him. Do you know how he reacted?" Bai Shaonan laughed bitterly. "It was only a few seconds, but I didn't miss the expression that said, 'I knew this already, why are you telling me?'"

Even Cui Yue didn't know that he'd made that face. It'd only been a few seconds, so brief that it didn't even register in his mind.

"He didn't even ask anything before accepting all of it as truth. Of course, it may also have something to do with his personality. But combined with the information from before, I don't think that's the likely cause. More probable is that his subconscious was already imprinted with the relevant information and available to come online at any time."

"If he really was sent here to replace you, then why is he so stupid? Even someone downplaying his abilities wouldn't take it to such an extent."

"That's also why I've reserved the other forty percent."

Qin Feng sat down across from Bai Shaonan. "Fu Wanli's and Fu Junzhan's real identities, recycling the failed product that is Cui Yue… If that's really the case, then it makes sense that he's being targeted at the same time as the board members."

"Makes what sense? I'm the one who personally brought the little hotpot back. Right now, he's mine. And he'll always be mine." Bai Shaonan had already drawn a line around Cui Yue and would not let go so easily. At the same time, he wouldn't permit the existence of a ghost who could challenge his position. They could work together, sure, but to get rid of him using Cui Yue as the tool? Dream on.

"I knew you would say that." Qin Feng nodded. In any case, what they needed now was to put all their energy into investigating Cui Yue's origin and then cut off the ties between that side and Cui Yue by all means necessary, giving Cui Yue no choice but to stand with Bai Shaonan.

And as for "Lovingly He," it might be heartless of him, but as long as they could save Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan wouldn't mind even if the whole board was replaced by new ghosts. With this murderer on the loose, drawing the attention of ghostly guards and the Fu family, it gave them time to carry out their own plan.

"Tonight, or tomorrow, I'll take little hotpot out to my place. See if it'll trigger more memories out of him." Bai Shaonan knew that Qin Feng would go investigate the Fus; he needn't even mention it.

"Remember to take him on a tour of the university too." Qin Feng hadn't forgotten the original purpose of their trip, but he believed without a doubt that Bai Shaonan had.

"Yes, you reminded me."

"Also, I received an email from the Judge's court. They asked why your heart rate was so high between two and three o'clock this morning."

"Did you respond?"

"No. As a subordinate, it's frankly a little embarrassing—my boss didn't even get to kissing and his heart rate was already so elevated. Or maybe you have a better excuse? Like maybe you got a gigolo?"

"Fuck off."

After coming to an agreement about their next steps, Bai Shaonan ripped off the silence charm on the door and kicked his guest out. In response to Bai Shaonan's dismissive attitude, Qin Feng assured him that he would report back to the Judge with the message that his boss was having a little too much fun with his right hand.

The idiots at the Judge's court would go to Qin Feng first whenever something came up, and even worse, if there were discrepancies between Bai

Shaonan and Qin Feng's words, they'd always choose to believe Qin Feng instead of Bai Shaonan. Therefore, if Qin Feng said that Bai Shaonan was pleasuring himself, the Judge's court would believe it.

Speechless, Bai Shaonan leaned his head back, telling himself in consolation that it would at least keep Cui Yue a secret. There were many ghosts at the Judge's court, and the less they knew, the better. He floated back into the bedroom wearily, deciding to find comfort in Cui Yue.

Perhaps it was the strange bed, but Cui Yue wasn't sleeping very well. Even when he did manage to sleep, he kept tossing and turning. The covers had long since been kicked away, and he even ended up floating in midair, sleeping inches above the floor. This was the scene Bai Shaonan saw as he stepped in. He couldn't help but shake his head and laugh. Good thing he told the little hotpot to put up some boundary talismans earlier; otherwise, the ghostling might have ended up on the floor below.

Bai Shaonan gently picked up Cui Yue and got into bed as well. Cui Yue squirmed a little, and his eyelids quivered as if he was about to wake up, but with the help of Bai Shaonan's low murmurs, he went back to sleep again but not before writhing around on the bed until he found a comfortable spot to settle.

Bai Shaonan had originally intended to use Cui Yue as a body pillow, but now, he looked helplessly at the ghostling's four limbs wrapped around his own neck and legs. Normally, shouldn't he be settling into Bai Shaonan's arms? What was up with this little sloth?

Never mind. It was impossible to grasp Cui Yue by using normal logic. Bai Shaonan sighed. Trying not to disturb Cui Yue, he did his best to arrange himself in a position in which he could lie down and sleep.

Thus, Cui Yue was incredibly well rested; he was full of energy when he opened his eyes. On the other hand, Bai Shaonan felt like he'd slept with someone pinching the back of his neck the whole time, and had a terrible day's sleep.

When Qin Feng came to deliver their dinner, he burst out laughing on the spot, intentionally murmuring to himself in a volume that Bai Shaonan could hear.

"By the looks of this, who's the butthurt one now?"

Now that all the leverage was in Qin Feng's hands, Bai Shaonan only glared at the other ghost but didn't dare rebuke him. It was embarrassing enough that the Judge thought he'd played with his right hand; he really didn't want Qin Feng to add a line that said "Bai Shaonan's ass hurts." That would make even the Judge look at him differently.

After dinner, Cui Yue was planning on staying in bed with his phone, when Bai Shaonan mentioned that they were going out.

"You thought we were gonna be tucked away in our room for five days?"

"We're not?"

"You may be able to do that, but I can't. Come on."

"Where are we going?"

"Look at this."

"'Farmer Starves to Death Five Hundred Pigs Sentenced to One Year in Prison.' Why do the pigs have to go to prison if the farmer starves to death? Will they know that they're in prison?"

"Not this one. Tap on the next headline."

"'Cheating Behind Boyfriend's Back Haunted House Revenge Results in Four Deaths and One Coma'?"

"Yes, this one."

"The police arrived on scene and found four dead bodies and one unconscious male with serious injuries. There were multiple signs of struggle at the scene…"

"Take a look at the ghost story inside, little hotpot."

"Following the economic collapse, a pair of sisters were relegated to the streets after their parents committed suicide via gas leak to escape

bankruptcy. Accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle, the younger sister climbed into bed with a Hong Hing triad boss. Not stopping at living as a mistress, she sold her older sister into prostitution, plotting to draw her sister to an abandoned warehouse and into the hands of the men from the Hong Hing triad. After seeing her own little sister stand behind the triad members and finally realizing that she'd been betrayed, the older sister grabbed a gun and a cleaver in the ensuing chaos and went on a rampage. In the end, none of the eighteen people at the scene survived.

"Even after death, the older sister's wrath persisted. Great resentment pushed her to finally become a ghoul. According to nearby residents, they would often hear the sounds of gunfire and women screaming from the warehouse at night. Urban legends say that it's the older sister torturing the younger sister over and over, keeping her from reincarnation. Though a developer previously sought to rebuild the warehouse, a string of accidents cropped up during construction, the worst of which…"

"Enough, you don't need to read the whole thing. What do you think?" Bai Shaonan interrupted Cui Yue's oration.

"The two sisters came together to make up a story to scare people. There was never conflict between them." Cui Yue religiously followed the palace drama every day and therefore thought he was an expert on the feuds between women.

"Of course not. There's a malevolent spirit here operating without a license. We're going to see if we can capture her and send her to school," Bai Shaonan said grumpily. Though, that was only his cover story. It was indisputable fact that the malevolent spirit in the warehouse killed the other people via the wronged boyfriend's hand. Ghosts tainted with blood had too much resentment on them and could never become a student at the school.

The warehouse had been his target all along, regardless of the ghosts that lived inside. Now that there was a murder case, he didn't need to make up an excuse to Cui Yue about why they were going there.

“You’re going to sponsor her education? She’s going to live in our home?” Cui Yue was suddenly alert. Was Bai Shaonan moving on? Was he trying to have it all?

Facing the sudden interrogation from Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan first blinked in surprise and then pursed his lips to keep from laughing out loud for no other reason than the fact that Cui Yue’s angry face and glaring eyes looked exactly like a jealous ghost’s.

Our home, the little hotpot had said.

Bai Shaonan’s heart was practically soaring in the air.

“Is that really your plan?” Cui Yue continued. He couldn’t rest until he had a clear answer.

“Qin Feng will deal with it. I won’t be involved. She can live in Qin Feng’s house,” Bai Shaonan quickly said. It was a classic case of throwing everything to Qin Feng. No wonder Qin Feng had come so far and had so much further to go on the road of boss fighting.

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11

The smell of bloodshed, the moonless night, the caged people… All of it was so intoxicating, even to a ghost.

In the warehouse, the she-ghost danced as she drifted through the air, a faint smile on her face. Out of habit, she used her right hand to brush her bangs away, revealing her manic and bloody eyes.

Blood that was not her own slid slowly down her fingertips and onto her forearm. It had taken her more than a little effort to keep the human blood on her body. After all, the crimson red against a fair canvas, like an affair spurned by the world, had an inexplicable beauty to it. She extended her tongue in pleasure, tasting this luxurious, forbidden wine.

The iron-sweet scent evoked a murderous desire within her. She moved her finger to the edge of her lips, adorning the cold smile with the vibrant color.

If only there were a few more people for her to play with. Even if people knew of her existence, hardly anyone was brave enough to come on this adventure. The five from a couple days ago were a rare feast she hadn't enjoyed in a long time.

Bai Shaonan crouched outside the warehouse with Cui Yue, peeking through the window to scope out what was inside. But perhaps it was better if they hadn't looked since they'd just seen the ghost licking her own arm. Both their expressions scrunched simultaneously into grimaces.

"See that? The she-ghost is too far gone; can't be saved." Bai Shaonan shook his head. *Help.* From what they'd just seen, it was clear this ghost was vicious, and a hundred times more so than a girl who hadn't received a gift from her boyfriend on Valentine's Day.

Cui Yue nodded in agreement. What was the point of licking blood? If it was all the same, he'd rather slather strawberry jam all over his arm and lick that instead.

"Do you know what you should do in these situations?" asked Bai Shaonan.

"One-on-one?" answered Cui Yue naively.

"Are you stupid?" Bai Shaonan was in pain. "If there's a crazy murderer with a cleaver on the street, hacking at everyone he sees, would you go one-on-one with him too?"

"No, I would call the cops." Cui Yue was suddenly enlightened. "We should call a cultivator and tell him to come exorcize the ghost?"

"He'll exorcize you first." Bai Shaonan flicked Cui Yue's forehead and said testily, "Dial three sixes to the ghostly guards, and tell them to come deal with it. Understand?"

"Three sixes?"

"Press the 'six' on your screen three times! Do you need me to teach you how to use the phone too?"

As Cui Yue was notifying the guards, Bai Shaonan repeatedly checked on the she-ghost's position through the window. It wasn't that he was incapable of dealing with this; it would take him but seconds to tear her to pieces, but he was afraid of setting a bad example for Cui Yue. The ghostling might get the wrong idea and think he should roll up his sleeves and fight if he ran into a super malevolent spirit instead of running away.

Cui Yue would only have been pinned down and ground into dust.

The ghost was floating on the second floor, still immersed in her own little world. Where *they* needed to go was the basement, and if they were

lucky, they wouldn't run into one another. Upon Bai Shaonan's orders, the two of them started to sneak their way in.

Cui Yue understood how serious the situation was, and so was more intent and focused than ever. He did everything Bai Shaonan said to a T, going exactly where Bai Shaonan told him to. If Bai Shaonan told him to crouch down, he'd even make sure his butt was on the ground. However, when Bai Shaonan signaled to him that they only had a few more steps to go, the rice and sweet potato meal that Qin Feng gave him before they left started to act up in his stomach. Even though he immediately clenched his butt cheeks, it was still too late.

Pwee-oot!

The crisp sound pierced through the pitch-dark room, which immediately returned to its original stillness. Cui Yue turned despondently to Bai Shaonan, who only looked resigned. He knew that though it might seem like nothing happened, that fart just now had already disturbed the fanatical she-ghost.

If ghosts could hear human-made sounds, naturally they could also hear sounds made by ghosts.

"Oh, hey, what are you guys doing here? What rare guests!"

Before Bai Shaonan could speak, the eerie female voice, accompanied by a rhythmic clanging of metal, slowly approached from the other end of the hallway. Apparently, not only had she come downstairs, she had even brought a weapon so that she was ready to start at any moment.

"Rare guests?" Bai Shaonan smirked, pulling Cui Yue behind himself and guarding him closely. "You've been squatting here for so long, it's about time you understand that when the master ghost is back, there will be no room for you, even to sweep the floors."

"Master ghost? Heh heh, you mean to say that you also used to—AHHHH!" Her unfinished sentence turned into a scream. Bai Shaonan had no patience to talk history with her; he lifted his hand and struck—hard. To

which malevolent spirit a place belonged to had always been determined by power.

Sharp pain pierced beside her ear, and the metal rod clattered loudly to the ground. The she-ghost wrapped her hands around her head and closed her eyes. In the haziness, the world disappeared, leaving only her and the piercing pain. Then, in the next second, the world was back again, along with a new sound.

It was the sound of her panting.

She opened her eyes and discovered that the floor was shaking. It took her a few seconds to realize that it was her own vision that was unsteady.

She hadn't expected this ghost to be more powerful than herself. The she-ghost knew that, this time, she was in real trouble. She had no option but to cede and leave. But it wasn't fair, it just wasn't fair. This was *her* fun house. Why did these two ghosts have to chase her away?

Unforgivable.

She bent down and picked up the crimson-colored rod, letting out a manic grin. If they wanted her to give in, she'd rather go down fighting. Just like that day. She had clenched her teeth and grabbed that meat cleaver, and finally killed those perverts who were after her body, as well as her shameless sister.

Bai Shaonan narrowed his eyes. He only ever knew how to destroy ghosts, not capture them. Furthermore, if he were to fight, it usually meant the other ghost would be disappeared into a million pieces, their souls crumbling to dust, never to come back into the world again. It was also why he'd rather the ghostly guards dealt with this, and not himself. However, this she-ghost was giving him no choice.

Since she was looking for death, he didn't mind handing it to her.

Cui Yue leaned out curiously from behind Bai Shaonan. He wanted to see how exactly Bai Shaonan would effortlessly destroy this ghost. After the casino hotel and the incident at the university, he finally had an idea of how

powerful the dean was. In this moment, he felt unusually calm. At most there was the slight sheepishness from having ruined the original plan.

And as for whether or not he was scared, that only manifested in the way he was clutching Bai Shaonan's sleeve.

Bai Shaonan watched coldly as the she-ghost took one attack after another from him, her body breaking into a million pieces like a shattered crystal. In the end, when she was about to disappear entirely, a yellowed hand suddenly appeared in midair, gently taking the she-ghost's hand, forcing her to let go of the metal rod.

"Sorry, my little sister has been embarrassing herself."

A gentle female voice rang out, and Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue turned their gaze toward another she-ghost who materialized. Even with long withered hair, wounds all over her face, and old tattered clothing, she still exuded an air of elegance.

This was the actual older sister. Meanwhile, the one who'd gone off the deep end was the younger sister who thought she was the older one.

Bai Shaonan quickly accepted this turn of events. Cui Yue, on the other hand, was frozen in place, forgetting how to react.

"I will stay with her until the ghostly guards come. Won't our esteemed guests please have mercy and let her go?" said the older sister.

"Not impossible, but the ghostly guards wouldn't do her any favors either," Bai Shaonan warned her.

"Still, better than disappearing from existence altogether."

The older sister gave a faint smile. She'd chosen to stay in the warehouse after death to keep her sister company, but unfortunately, her sister was surrounded by so much resentful energy that she didn't even notice the older sister's presence. She'd watched every time her little sister murdered people, but had no way of stopping it. Meanwhile, after the little sister absorbed all those innocent souls, she'd become so strong that the

older sister could no longer appear, and the little sister started thinking of herself as the older one.

When the younger sister was stricken down by Bai Shaonan and at a disadvantage, the older sister could finally materialize. The first thing she saw was her little sister about to disappear into the ether, and terrified, she'd rushed to show herself and plead her case.

The younger sister had been violently shaking her head this whole time because her weapon was taken away. But slowly, she found herself sunken into a familiar embrace. The instant she realized this, her eyes widened as the image of a gentle face appeared in her mind, almost taking up her entire consciousness.

Memories replayed in her head, over and over as they pursued her, making her whole body heat up until it was almost burning, as though something was about to break out of its mold, crushing the absurdity in front of her.

"Sister…"

She finally remembered.

There never had been any climbing into the triad boss's bed, nor any selling her sister into prostitution. At the start, there was only a pair of sisters; the gentle and compliant older sister and the wild and unruly younger one. They had both been duped. When the younger sister watched the dozens of men pinning her older sister to the ground, she was unable to see anything else but red. She wanted those men dead, and she would give her own life to achieve it.

In the end, she succeeded but also lost everything about herself in the process. The rumors said that she was the older sister, and so she was; people talked of how the younger sister betrayed the older one, so she hated herself, throwing herself into all sorts of murderous games, unable to escape. With only blood for company, she'd fallen further and further.

Until now.

Bai Shaonan's expression remained unchanged, but inside he was already thrilled about the report he wouldn't have to write for destroying her. He pretended to ponder for a minute before saying, "I wouldn't intentionally break apart two sisters with such strong bonds. Fine, you two go up to the second floor and wait there for the guards to come."

The older sister was overjoyed. She was about to express her gratitude, when Bai Shaonan continued, "We were just passing by, which was when we called the ghostly guards. We never came into the warehouse, isn't that right?"

"Absolutely! Our esteemed guests only taught my little sister a little lesson, in the doorway without coming in." The older sister reacted quickly as she immediately understood the real reason Bai Shaonan was so kind as to let them go. Of course, if she could save her little sister, she would agree to anything; keeping her mouth shut was easy enough.

The older sister gave a slight bow to the two to express her gratitude before taking her sister and floating to the side, demonstrating with her actions that there had been "no communication" between the two groups.

"Hey, little hotpot, you dropped your jaw." Bai Shaonan peered at his sleeve still tightly clutched in a certain ghost's hand. Hm. As he thought, the little hotpot was very scared. It was a good thing that he was here.

Cui Yue's hand was already on his jaw before he realized with a start that Bai Shaonan was teasing him. At most he forgot to close his mouth; his jaw was most certainly not on the ground. Cui Yue puffed up his cheeks in protest.

Come to think of it, the sisters' tale was certainly full of twists and turns that were more nerve-racking than any palace drama he'd watched. Only an old ghost like Bai Shaonan who was used to these kinds of situations would be unfazed. If Cao B was here, Cui Yue believed that not only would his jaw fall down, he'd be crying out at every turn.

"Why are you so surprised? Not every ghost story is real; a lot of them are made up," Bai Shaonan explained when he astutely caught Cui Yue's secretly dissenting gaze.

"But this is way *too* far off," said Cui Yue. The younger sister had died defending her older sister; this was the complete opposite of the ghost story.

"Who do you think were the people after them?" Bai Shaonan pinched Cui Yue's cheeks and said, "They were entirely wiped out by two girls. If word gets out, they'll not only be humiliated, they'd lose all credibility. In any case, the people were already dead, so why not change the story to a version that benefits them?"

"What's so good about the little sister being in bed with the triad boss?"

"There's nothing in the world more painful and sorrowful than to be betrayed by the person closest to you, especially your own flesh and blood. They used that fact to explain how an outsider was able to gain the upper hand against them," said Bai Shaonan. "Anyway, that's it for this case. It's time for business."

Bai Shaonan took Cui Yue's hand and dashed into the gray wall behind them. Cui Yue closed his eyes instinctively, and when he opened them again, they were no longer inside the warehouse.

"Huh? This is…"

Cui Yue looked around at their surroundings in shock. They were currently in a room covered in dust with two beds, one dresser, one operating table, and dozens of gigantic transparent pots taller than them.

"Welcome to my home," Bai Shaonan said with a smile.

Home?

He called this stark and sterile place home?

Cui Yue looked at Bai Shaonan in disbelief. Could this guy be so poor that he couldn't afford a better unit?

"Kid, I didn't even yell at you about that fart earlier, and you dare think that about me? Hm?" Bai Shaonan feigned anger and gave Cui Yue's little butt a kick. He knew exactly what the twerp was thinking. The money in Bai Shaonan's account was not only enough to keep himself comfortable but even three extra little hotpots on the side as well.

"Sorry." Cui Yue put a hand on his butt and was about to protest, but frankly, he was the one who disturbed the she-ghost earlier. Never mind one kick, he would stick out his rear for ten more if Bai Shaonan was so inclined.

"Forget it." Bai Shaonan didn't continue on his case. After the earlier events, Cui Yue didn't have time to wonder about the real reason they were here, which was perfect for Bai Shaonan. He sat on the bed and gestured for Cui Yue to sit as well before continuing, "There are boundaries set up around this place; only certain ghosts can get in. Other ghosts and humans could never discover this place. In fact, they would see the wall outside as only an ordinary wall."

"That's so cool." Cui Yue opened his eyes wide unconsciously. This was a natural reaction when he was surprised.

"Of course, this space and the boundaries were created by my father. Before he decided to make good and switched tracks to become a professor, he was kind of a crazy scientist. If he wasn't so adamant about his surname being Bai, he would've been absorbed into the Fu family a long time ago." Bai Shaonan's face took on a faint note of pride as he said this. It made Cui Yue feel a little uncomfortable.

"If he created this space, then why doesn't he live here?"

"This is where I grew up. He didn't want too many ghosts to come here. Slowly, it was abandoned due to its distance from the underworld. I used to drop by occasionally when I had time, but it's been more than a century since I've been back."

A bitter smile emerged at the corner of Bai Shaonan's lips. At the same time, an alarm went off in Cui Yue's mind as he suddenly realized something: could this guy have dragged him here to help clean the place up?

The dust was thicker than a finger's length. It would take at least a few days to clean—wait, no. He refused to be a janitor! Cui Yue thought adamantly, no matter what Bai Shaonan said, he would not clean!

Bai Shaonan thought Cui Yue would remember something once he was in here, but much to his surprise, not only did the room fail to trigger memories, but it was given a disdainful once-over by Cui Yue, who murmured, "How could you possibly clean up all this dust?" not realizing that Bai Shaonan had heard every word.

Bai Shaonan looked at the dinginess around them. Come to think of it, it didn't occur to him that cleaning was a good excuse to keep them here for a long time.

With a mask over his expressionless face and a towel in his hands, Cui Yue wiped all the gigantic pots clean.

A certain dean only needed to say, "Who was the disobedient student who followed me to the eighth floor again? If the board members find out, I'm sure the student involved would certainly be kicked out of school." Already worried about his academic standing, that very poor student himself immediately gave in and offered his labor to clean the place up. Thus, Bai Shaonan was in charge of cleaning the bed and floor, while Cui Yue was responsible for cleaning the pots.

No. Those weren't pots—they were test tubes.

When Bai Shaonan heard Cui Yue call the test tubes "pots," his face instantly darkened on the spot. He took in a deep breath, repeated the silent mantra of, "You picked him yourself. The little hotpot is for loving, not beating," which managed to suppress his urge to lift his foot again.

In order to give Cui Yue a chance to focus on this environment, Bai Shaonan purposefully stayed silent. However, thirty minutes later, the

ghostling gave no indication of a reaction but did start showing great progress in the skill of glass cleaning. After endlessly repeating the same motions, he learned the secret to achieving the shiniest glass with the least amount of effort.

However, as he cleaned, Cui Yue started noticing strange things. After wiping away the thick layer of dust, he saw labels at the upper left corner of the test tubes. On one was written "Shaonan no. 1" in large letters. He didn't pay it any mind at first, assuming that it was Bai Shaonan's writing, but when he found "Shaonan no. 2," "Shaonan no. 3," and "Shaonan no. 4" labels as well, he couldn't help but stop and glance toward the dean in confusion.

Was this guy a train? Why did he have so many different numbers?

"What is it, little hotpot?" Bai Shaonan asked.

Cui Yue blushed. He had been mumbling silently to himself but didn't realize that his eyes had betrayed him. Since Bai Shaonan paused in the middle of changing the sheets to question him, he answered reluctantly, "… Why are there so many numbers?"

"You mean those labels? The number two and number three?" Cui Yue nodded, and Bai Shaonan answered, "Those are failed prototypes. The Shaonans in them have already been disposed of; only the test tubes are saved just in case."

"What do you mean the Shaonans in them have already been 'disposed of'?" Cui Yue was shocked.

"Oh, forgot to tell you—I'm not an ordinary ghost," Bai Shaonan said casually. "I am a unique spiritual existence created by my father using yin jade that's cultivated within ancient tombs, made specially to get rid of those equilibrium-disrupting people."

His tone remained nonchalant, as if he was talking about how much he enjoyed dinner.

Meanwhile, Cui Yue exploded on the spot. Unique spiritual existence? This reveal was way more earth-shattering than some side gig at the Judge's court or that independent committee.

The underworld was capable of creating artificial souls! They had to be ten times more advanced than any human technology.

"Ordinary ghosts would more or less have karmic attachments and backgrounds, which makes it inconvenient for this position. That's why the Judge's court asked my father to create a pseudo-soul with a completely blank history. He went through countless failed prototypes before he finally created me. That's all." Bai Shaonan saw that Cui Yue had nearly shut himself down, and explained in a little more detail.

His identity was top secret at Judge Yanluo's court. In order to keep him from going out of control, there was even an electrocardiogram installed in the grand office. Whenever he got a little excited, the court would think that something had happened to him. Of course, he also had to report his whereabouts to the Fu family on a regular basis. After all, if this kind of technology were to get out, the results would be more than disastrous.

"So— So you're actually…" Cui Yue still couldn't believe what he was hearing. "A yin-jade spirit?"

"What yin-jade spirit? My body is just made from yin jade. If I injure myself in battle, I only need to be patched up with another piece of yin jade; it's very convenient. Of course, I can't tell you how exactly I was turned from jade to what I look like now." Bai Shaonan rolled his eyes. He was a biochemical miracle, to say the least. Calling him a jade spirit as though he were some sprite was an absolute insult.

The Judge's court needed a ghost who existed outside of the karmic cycles to do their dirty work, and Bai Qinghe's research fulfilled their needs —they hit it off immediately. Thus, Bai Shaonan, the garbage disposal, was born. Like a real living human, Bai Shaonan had a childlike appearance

when he was first created. Only after numerous and repeated experiments did he slowly become the way he looked today. This was why he claimed to have grown up here.

"Qin Feng is the real spirit. I was bored one day and decided to make him out of a few blades of grass. I couldn't learn the ways of my father creating souls out of dead objects, so I had to use living things as the basis. Obviously, time has proven that, aside from some personality issues, Qin Feng's loyalty has been pretty decent." Bai Shaonan casually spilled Qin Feng's secret, but not before adding in his mind that jade spirits weren't the lowest thing he'd ever heard because grass spirits had to be the lowest of the low.

This meant that Bai Qinghe had to first create Bai Shaonan, who then created Qin Feng… These two members of the Bai family were actually just like mad scientists straight from a novel. Cui Yue knew he must look incredibly dumb right now since he could no longer control the absolutely baffled expression on his face.

But Cui Yue's feelings very quickly went from shock to sheepishness. Turned out, the ghosts in the Bai family were all built entirely on innate talent, and were highly skilled. On the other hand, he didn't have any proficiencies to speak of. Frankly, it was embarrassing to claim that he was on the Bai family's side.

Of course, a simple mind like his was unable to see the dark side of the matter, and Bai Shaonan didn't plan to tell him either.

"Hey, little hotpot, go look at the third test tube from the left by the window—that's where Qin Feng was born," said Bai Shaonan.

Cui Yue floated up to the test tube, and after wiping away the dust, found a little label plastered on it. The squiggly handwriting clearly looked like it had been written by a little brat.

"Three Blades of Grass."

Cui Yue's eye twitched. He didn't expect the cult leader Qin's baby name to be so unsophisticated.

"Qin Feng was… err, I made him when I was twelve using human mathematics. Speaking of, to have succeeded at an experiment at such a young age, I must be a prodigy." Bai Shaonan couldn't help but chuckle when he recounted this memory almost proudly, and also wistfully.

No.

The word suddenly popped into Cui Yue's mind for reasons he wasn't aware of, but when he realized what was happening, he'd already said the word out loud.

"What do you mean 'no'?" A light glinted in Bai Shaonan's eyes. He was right to bring Cui Yue here. If Cui Yue's hollow eyes and rebuke of him was normal, then he must be the abnormal one.

No, he wasn't a prodigy.

The strange voice that suddenly appeared in Cui Yue's mind startled him. He almost thought he'd been possessed by the soul of Billy Milligan and was displaying signs of dissociative ghost disorder. But before he could react, he not only heard a voice but also saw an image appear in his mind. A man lay stark naked in another half-naked man's arm, both of their faces flushed from the aftermath of sex.

"At twelve… he must be a prodigy."

"No, Daddy—he's not a prodigy, you are. You're the real prodigy."

"Heh, flattery on its own doesn't mean anything."

"I'm not just saying it. Didn't you start your research as soon as you died? That Bai scum was only lucky. You were the first one to think of it. You're the real prodigy."

"That's why you have a sweet mouth."

"Daddy, it's not just my mouth that's sweet. I'm sweet down there too, didn't you know?"

It was the father and son.

Cui Yue realized that they were the pair who had appeared and made love in his mind when they were in the forest. They were here to "visit" him again.

His rebuke of Bai Shaonan that had popped out just now came right from the son's mouth.

He knew that this was abnormal. It wasn't possible for him to have a memory as an onlooker. If these weren't memories from when he was alive, why did they keep showing up in his mind?

Before Cui Yue could think of an answer, he suddenly fell unconscious and his body pitched forward. Bai Shaonan hurried to catch him so he wouldn't crash to the ground. This was Bai Qinghe's specially created space. Without the guidance of a Bai ghost, no man or ghost was getting out of here.

Bai Shaonan set Cui Yue on the freshly made bed and reached out a hand to gently smooth the wrinkles between the ghostling's brows. His heart ached at Cui Yue passing out, but he knew that it was unavoidable.

As soon as they got to the bottom of this, there would be no next time. Bai Shaonan planted a kiss on Cui Yue's forehead and made a silent promise.

Cui Yue felt like he was once again locked in place, unable to move. In front of his eyes was a pitch blackness. The only one of his five senses still working was his hearing. First, Cui Yue could hear the son giving orders for the ghostling to carry out, but slowly, the guy's words stopped making sense, and eventually, the son went off into the corner to pleasure himself.

Cui Yue should have felt exasperated at the turn of events; he should have been like Bai Shaonan, rolling his eyes toward the sky, but after hearing what the son had to say, he only felt flabbergasted.

The son only ever said three sentences, all of which had incredibly straightforward themes.

"When you wake up, try to get close to Bai Shaonan. You're of the same origin, it'll be easy."

"Bai Shaonan is hypervigilant. I don't care what you do, try to become intimate with him, dazzle him until he's dizzy. Make sure he listens to the things you say, that's the only way the plan can go forward, that way…"

"Only then will Daddy go down to hell with me. No, Daddy, let's become one and disappear from this world."

So he was actually a spy?

When Cui Yue opened his eyes, his feelings were too complicated to articulate. The son's words reverberated in his mind.

All of his memories before death were wiped in order to get close to Bai Shaonan as a blank slate. After gaining Bai Shaonan's trust, he would start to interfere with his decisions. Then, in the final showdown, he would reveal himself to be a mole from the big boss, and that everything was a conspiracy, or something like that. Cui Yue thought about it for a second and concluded it was a plan doomed to fail from the start.

At the end of the day, he did have some self-awareness. It wasn't that he had no self-esteem, but if he thought he could accomplish something like that with his intellect, then either he'd have to be overly narcissistic, or the big boss couldn't be right in the head. Besides, who did they think Bai Shaonan was? He had seen much more temptation than he'd consumed, and even if he could be swindled, there was still Qin Feng there to guard his door. There was absolutely no way the plan could work.

Most importantly, he'd already devoted himself to be a sheep under the cult of Qin Feng the Great. He firmly believed that Qin Feng was omnipotent, and that obviously applied to stopping Cui Yue.

That son and his former self had acted rashly without knowing Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan at all. But that was all right since Cui Yue didn't remember the details anyway. If the son later came to ask him how he was

progressing, he would swear on his death that he knew nothing. He would even say to him, "Who are you? You must've gotten the wrong person."

Mm-hmm. It was decided then. Cui Yue secretly made the choice to cross over to the light side. After witnessing firsthand the powers of Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng and the way they ripped their enemies to pieces, only death-seekers would insist on opposing them.

"You're awake, little hotpot?"

Bai Shaonan had been waiting by the bed this whole time. When Cui Yue's eyelids started to flit, he knew the ghostling was about to wake up. However, he held off from making any sound at the beginning, allowing Cui Yue some time to organize his thoughts. Of course, he was right to do so.

Cui Yue first exhibited confliction as though he was trying to decide between pork chops or fried chicken for dinner, which then slowly morphed into an expression that seemed to indicate he'd settled on fried chicken, and at last, he took on a determined look that seemed to say, "Fried chicken is the best."

Extremely adorable. Bai Shaonan could feel his heart melting.

Hearing Bai Shaonan's voice, Cui Yue's heart quivered. Crossing over to the light side was something he'd decided on his own, secretly. He couldn't very well say, "I'm a mole, but I'm very comfortable here, so I've decided to double-cross," right in front of Master Bai himself, right?

No, he couldn't.

Even though Bai Shaonan had a crush on him, Cui Yue knew that a master of the house would never give clemency to a traitor. Usually the likes of him were disposed of with an "off with his head." He definitely couldn't let Bai Shaonan know about his secrets.

"I'm fine." Cui Yue put up a composed front. He'd decided to answer with this no matter what Bai Shaonan asked him. Under no circumstances could he let Bai Shaonan know about a connection between him and the son.

“Oh, really?” Bai Shaonan couldn’t help but laugh. Cui Yue didn’t even dare to look in his direction. He forced composure even as his voice quavered. Bai Shaonan didn’t know where the ghostling got the confidence to lie to him with a performance like this.

Cui Yue trying to play mind games with him was like a house cat teasing a lion. He deliberately moved into Cui Yue’s vision, and holding that gently quivering face, forced the ghostling to look directly at him. “Then why won’t the little hotpot look at me?”

“I’m not *not* looking at you.” Cui Yue’s pupils contracted. He was focusing so much on his lines that he forgot to plan out his body language too. He suddenly got a feeling that he was doomed; Bai Shaonan must have noticed something, and it was only a matter of time before he confessed everything.

“What did you see just now, little hotpot?” Bai Shaonan smiled in a way that he thought would knock the whole world dead. Wasn’t the little hotpot infatuated with him? Since the ghostling had clammed up, Bai Shaonan decided to use his beauty to entice that mouth to open.

Cui Yue practically bounced off the bed. What was the meaning behind this smile that came out of nowhere? Was it “I already found out the truth from your sleep talking just now, so you better be good and fess up”?

“Will you tell me, little hotpot?” Bai Shaonan deliberately lowered his voice, attempting to seduce Cui Yue into surrendering. At the same time, he moved his hand from Cui Yue’s face cheek to his ass cheek, giving it a malicious squeeze, implying that if Cui Yue didn’t talk, he would find another way in.

Cui Yue received the message loud and clear. He looked at Bai Shaonan with bewilderment in his eyes, “You’re going to spank my butt?”

Bai Shaonan was quiet for a moment. Why was it that Cui Yue always managed to drag an R-rated plot in a PG-13 direction?

"Yes, and only after taking your pants off. No underwear either." Bai Shaonan meant to hint that it wouldn't be as simple as a spanking, but seeing Cui Yue's horrified expression, he decided to reserve the "surprise" until the end.

Fear flashed across Cui Yue's eyes—he was terrified of pain. He should have known there was foul play behind Bai Shaonan's smile; Bai Shaonan must have been planning to spank his butt until it resembled a glowing red watermelon. Cui Yue never thought of himself as smart, but in that instant, an idea formed in his mind to only tell Bai Shaonan some of the truth by leaving out the son's last sentence. He started to think perhaps his brains only showed up in moments of crises such as this.

Cui Yue immediately told Bai Shaonan about the prodigy conversation between the father and son. Bai Shaonan listened on with no expression as he wondered why his beauty was not enough to seduce Cui Yue but a traditional spanking was able to change his mind. He even speculated whether spanking occupied a higher position in Cui Yue's heart than him.

"And?" Bai Shaonan didn't miss the sheepishness in Cui Yue's eyes. He could see at a glance that there was more the ghostling hadn't said.

"And what? I told you." Cui Yue struggled in vain.

"Hm? That's really everything?" Bai Shaonan's hand traveled to the waistband of Cui Yue's pants. It took only a fraction of a second for him to pull the pants down, revealing the underwear with little elephant prints.

"The son also told me to seduce you! That's it! Don't take off my underwear!" Cui Yue held Bai Shaonan's errant hand in place as he spilled the rest as fast as he could.

"Seduce me?" Bai Shaonan peered at the Dumbo underwear. He pursed his lips hard to prevent a laugh from getting out. "Dressed like this?"

"I've never tried to seduce you! Give me back my pants!" Cui Yue failed at retrieving his clothing, and just as his attention turned to the duvet cover, Bai Shaonan shoved the covers to the ground with one fell swoop.

"No, you *have* seduced me." Bai Shaonan's voice grew raspy and his eyes darkened as his gaze swept over the pale legs.

Cui Yue looked back at him in astonishment. He was surprised to find that Bai Shaonan's expression was the same as when he had pinned Cui Yue onto the bed the day before. He instinctively covered the Dumbo print on his underwear. Before worrying about his chastity, he was first and foremost concerned about Bai Shaonan's taste.

Why was he turned on when he saw the elephants?

Could jade spirits have a tendency toward unusual kinks?

In his distress, Cui Yue didn't realize that he'd said all this out loud again. Bai Shaonan, the jade spirit, was so upset that he was no longer in the mood for anything.

"Hey, little hotpot, when have you ever seen a human or ghost cross the species barrier and fall in love with an animal spirit?" Bai Shaonan sighed, returning the pants to Cui Yue. If he didn't correct the misconceptions in Cui Yue's mind, he absolutely believed that Qin Feng would be able to draw them out of Cui Yue. If that happened, Bai Shaonan would never know peace again.

"Am I wrong?" Cui Yue stared at Bai Shaonan in a huff.

"Silly. Even if you were wearing alien-shaped underwear, I'd still be turned on. Because *you* are what I like, little hotpot." Bai Shaonan smiled bitterly. He had to be the first ghost ever forced into confessing his feelings to exonerate himself of a suspected kink.

Cui Yue was stunned. He couldn't believe that Bai Shaonan really said it out loud, and in such an even tone. It was the same tone of voice that Cao B used when reminding him to bring his wallet before going out the door.

He knew a long time ago that Bai Shaonan had a crush on him, but Bai Shaonan had never said it out loud, so he also feigned ignorance. But now, the last layer of the veil had been torn off. How should he respond?

Though to be fair, the veil was already torn yesterday, only they both had chosen to ignore it.

If Bai Shaonan liked him so much, it would be—ahem, no, he just figured it would be inappropriate not to give a response.

The other party in this situation looked on in amusement as Cui Yue turned red as a cooked shrimp while still attempting to maintain a facade of calm. It was clear to Bai Shaonan that Cui Yue liked him, but his boyish bashfulness wouldn't let him express his true feelings. With no Qin Feng here to disturb them, Bai Shaonan didn't mind acting the adult and gave Cui Yue more time for "consideration."

"Aren't you afraid that I was sent by your enemies to interfere with you?" Cui Yue did not forget what the son had said. What if the result of their getting together would become a reenactment of *Romeo and Juliet*?

"May I ask what you could possibly do to interfere with me?" Bai Shaonan arched his brows, clearly not at all concerned about Cui Yue's worry.

Cui Yue was quiet again. Never before had he seen a ghost effectively say to the object of his love that they couldn't possibly hold any sway over them, especially after a confession. And yet, he felt like there was truth to Bai Shaonan's words.

Maybe this was simply Bai Shaonan's style?

Then Cui Yue considered this: if he ever went out of his mind and joined the dark side, and Bai Shaonan also happened to sustain a brain injury that made him only listen to Cui Yue, they'd still have one last guardian to beat them back to the righteous path.

That was Three Blades of Grass Qin Feng.

So, there was nothing to worry about.

Bai Shaonan saw that Cui Yue remained silent with his head down, and he finally ran out of patience. Grabbing the duvet cover, he wrapped it

around Cui Yue before pulling the whole package into his arms. “What else do you have to say, little hotpot?”

Cui Yue peered at Bai Shaonan and purposely turned his face. “Nothing.”

Seeing that Cui Yue had finally given up, Bai Shaonan laughed. “But you still have so many questions you can ask, like about my income, my bank account number, my job, my interests…”

“We’re not on an arranged date to prep for marriage right now!” Cui Yue couldn’t help but interrupt him.

The smile in Bai Shaonan’s eyes deepened. “Of course not. I’m trying to promote myself to you, see if you’d like to seal the deal.”

“I’ll only consider it at a discount,” Cui Yue said, glaring at Bai Shaonan.

Bai Shaonan once again cracked up. “Yes, yes, of course, any kind of discount you want.”

Cui Yue lowered his gaze again. Just as Bai Shaonan was about to question him again, Cui Yue abruptly lifted his face, closed his eyes, and planted a firm kiss on Bai Shaonan’s slightly cool lips.

“Mmm…”

Bai Shaonan’s lips were turned up slightly in a smile. Just as Cui Yue was about to move away after the short peck, Bai Shaonan took the initiative and, holding the ghostling’s head, quietly deepened their kiss. His tongue reached out to persuade Cui Yue to open his mouth, then intertwined with Cui Yue’s. Saliva dripped down Cui Yue’s chin, which was lapped up by Bai Shaonan like a large cat drinking water.

Cui Yue’s face was completely flushed as his rating suddenly elevated to an R-rated level, a difficulty he’d never attempted before. Even so, Cui Yue still gathered up his courage and said, “I’ve… checked the merchandise… I-It’s a deal…”

Bai Shaonan paused for a moment before coming to a realization. He burst out laughing. Indeed, this was the little hotpot he'd set his eyes on. Even his acceptance of the dean's affection was so refreshingly unusual, not to mention creative.

Oh no. The little hotpot was too cute, and Bai Shaonan was finding it a little too hard to hold back his more primal urges.

He held Cui Yue tight, forcing himself to turn his lust into laughter, venting his desire outwards. The duvet had slid down in the process of their making out, and Cui Yue clearly felt a hardness pressed up against his behind. To his surprise, Bai Shaonan chose to hold it in instead of pushing him further.

"Silly. I told you there's a surveillance machine at the Judge's court. If my emotions fluctuate too much, the alarm will sound. It already sounded once yesterday, and if it happens again today, there would be a whole row of Judge Yanluo's ghosts lined up outside waiting to ask questions." Bai Shaonan had wrapped Cui Yue in the duvet first before embracing him precisely to avoid giving in to his urges in a moment of weakness.

Cui Yue was baffled. If the surveillance was so strict then… wasn't that no different from Jinjiang censorship? Wouldn't that mean they'd never be able to go any lower than the neck?

"I can just put in a request to temporarily turn off the surveillance." Bai Shaonan flicked Cui Yue's forehead grumpily. Screw that nothing-lower-than-the-neck nonsense. Bullshit! He wanted to go into explicit detail specifically below the waist.

When he was young and unruly, he used to request temporary shutoff of surveillance with the excuse of watching porn. The Judge's court deliberated for three days but finally approved it in the end. And now, they had no reason not to approve his request to consummate an intimate relationship with his partner in private.

Cui Yue's face stiffened. He needed to apply in advance to have sex with his boyfriend, and it was possible that Judge Yanluo's court might note it into the records…

What era was this! Why were there still copulation-managing eunuchs in hell!

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Cui Yue was successfully promoted from a lackey squatter to boyfriend and immediately enjoyed the benefits—he didn't have to clean the glass anymore. However, the reason Bai Shaonan relieved him of his cleaning duty was more so because the dean had reached his desired goal. Cui Yue really was a pawn sent by some unknown force in an attempt to control Bai Shaonan. But since the ghostling had been so thoughtfully delivered, he naturally wouldn't return him.

They treated Cui Yue as a pawn, but he would rather treat Cui Yue as a gem.

And as for which unknown force… Looking at the entire underworld, he could count all the possible forces on three fingers. Bai Shaonan couldn't help but smirk. If it wasn't for the fact that "Lovingly He" also included Cui Yue in their targets, he would have even considered joining forces to make trouble for the board.

Since Cui Yue learned of the Judge's court and their surveillance, he refused all acts of intimacy, including making out. Bai Shaonan sighed countless times over this but, in the end, could only resort to rushing Qin Feng to see if they could get back to the underworld any sooner.

The ghostly guards had the entire warehouse surrounded. Bai Shaonan didn't want to run into them, so he led Cui Yue down a roundabout path back to the hotel. The sun had risen by then, and the morning light gradually chased away the darkness on the land. Bai Shaonan carefully

moved around the rays of sunlight. It wasn't a big deal if they shone on him, but he didn't want a large amount of yang energy to touch Cui Yue beside him.

As they drifted along, Bai Shaonan's sight suddenly set on something a short distance away. Cui Yue followed his gaze and found that a translucent soul was floating in midair up ahead.

The petite and curvy figure as well as the long flowing hair indicated that it was a she-ghost. The sun hadn't yet reached her, but based on her position, in about fifteen minutes, she would be entirely exposed under direct sunlight.

"She must be suicidal."

Bai Shaonan ordered Cui Yue to stay put while he floated over to talk some sense into the other ghost. He often ran into freshly deceased souls in the human realm who, because of their newly cold body and their presumably stupid minds, would often try to catch some rays. But ghosts are not plants. Sunlight would not provide them with energy via photosynthesis. In fact, their souls would disintegrate into nothingness because a new ghost couldn't bear to take in too much yang energy.

Practically every time he'd come up on a mission, Bai Shaonan would run into a couple of ghosts doing this. So, to him, initiating a conversation was only a natural force of habit. He'd forgotten, however, that what he saw as matter of fact, to another ghost, was the strangest behavior ever witnessed.

Cui Yue stared after Bai Shaonan's receding figure. They hadn't been together for all of twenty-four hours, and Bai Shaonan was already off to flirt with another she-ghost, right in front of his eyes!

He followed in a huff. However, since Bai Shaonan was planning on making quick work of this intervention, his speed never accounted for the fact that another ghost might be following behind. By the time Cui Yue

finally caught up, he could hear Bai Shaonan trying to pull the she-ghost back to reality.

"If you wanna die, I can help with that. No need to stay out here in the sun."

Cui Yue was taken aback. He thought Bai Shaonan had been drawn here by feminine beauty, so where had this delinquent tone come from?

The she-ghost was a little surprised at the sudden appearance of Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue. Though, when she spoke, it wasn't to answer their question. "You can see me?"

"We're all ghosts here, of course we can… Wait, you're not a ghost, you're a living spirit. Where's your body? Hurry on back, otherwise you'll really be done for," Bai Shaonan answered.

Out of respect for the opposite sex, Cui Yue only took one curious glance before averting his eyes. Though, with that one look alone, he really couldn't tell whether she was a dead ghost or a living spirit. Bai Shaonan glimpsed Cui Yue out of the corner of his eye. He didn't say anything as he reached out a hand to pull Cui Yue in front of him, shielding the ghostling from the approaching sunlight with his own translucent body.

The living spirit blinked before letting out a smile. The first ghost was clearly clutching the other ghost so tightly as a show of dominance to her.

Cui Yue squirmed uneasily. He knew that Bai Shaonan was trying to block the light for him, but he felt a little embarrassed at the public display of affection.

Bai Shaonan did not intend to let go of Cui Yue as he continued the previous conversation, "Do you not know how to return to your body? Do you want me to show you?"

He wasn't trying to brag, but in the early days of his heaven-ordained missions, his yin-jade body would often sustain a whole host of injuries due to the power imbalance between his opponents and himself. Sometimes he'd even need to replace the entire body. When it came to transferring a

consciousness from one body to the next, if he claimed second place, no ghost would dare to be first.

The living spirit shook her head gently. "I'm waiting for someone to go down the Yellow Spring Path together to the underworld. I have to stand out here, or else he won't see me," she said, upon seeing the doubt on Bai Shaonan's face.

"Is he a human or a ghost?"

"To be honest, I don't know. I don't even know where he is at the moment, or whether he's human or animal. I can only sense that he's nearby. In our last life, I had gone before him. This time I want to wait."

It had to be a profound love for them to still remember each other even after reincarnation. Bai Shaonan was quiet for a moment. If it were him in that situation, he'd be running wildly all over the world looking for that person instead of calmly waiting in one spot. He thought about it and finally said, "Let's find somewhere where you can tell me about you and him. I'm no one important, but maybe I can help look."

The living spirit smiled happily at this unexpected offer. "No, no, thank you! I'm a living spirit, this is the farthest I can go. I'm very grateful that you're willing to help."

"Where's your body?"

"Very close, in that hospital back there. I've been put in a private room, so you guys won't disturb the other patients if you come."

Cui Yue glanced up at Bai Shaonan. He knew the extent of his boyfriend's power; it was clear from how quickly Wang Qianyi was able to enter reincarnation. If this ghost said that he would help, there was a high chance he could find this living spirit's other half. But what he most wanted to know was why Bai Shaonan was being so friendly to a strange spirit?

He still remembered the first time they met, when Bai Shaonan threatened him. It was a completely different attitude compared to the way he was treating this girl.

Hmph. *Men*.

Bai Shaonan could sense the entirety of the jealousy emanating from Cui Yue. It was true that since they'd established their relationship, Cui Yue's possessiveness had increased logarithmically. If he wasn't in front of an outsider with an image to maintain, Bai Shaonan would be so overjoyed that he'd sprout flowers from his head.

"Jealous, hm?" When the girl turned around, Bai Shaonan quickly landed a peck on Cui Yue's cheek before saying a few words of comfort by his ear. "Little hotpot, you can't leave others in misery just because you found your happiness. It's not like we can't help, right?"

Bai Shaonan was right, but was the PDA necessary?

Even though the girl couldn't see, Cui Yue was still extremely embarrassed. If it wasn't for fear of the sunlight shining on him, he would've bounded out of Bai Shaonan's arms instead of resorting to angry glares at a certain sneaking cat.

The sneaky old cat had already been trained to have an unusually thick skin thanks to daily attacks from Qin Feng. A few glares were not nearly enough to shake him. He was even itching for more upon seeing Cui Yue staring at him so "passionately."

Cui Yue saw that Bai Shaonan was about to kiss him again and raised his hand at a desperate attempt to block the other ghost's lips. His ears were bright red, but he didn't forget to keep his voice down. "All right, I got it!"

A smile flashed across Bai Shaonan's eyes. He wiggled his eyebrows and stuck out his tongue, licking Cui Yue's slightly cold hand. The ghostling shook in surprise and almost fell out of Bai Shaonan's arms.

"Bai Shaonan, if you keep doing this, I'm going to report you to Qin Feng!" Even after his promotion to boyfriend, Cui Yue knew that it was impossible to manage Bai Shaonan all on his own. The only way to keep the ghost in check was to bring Qin Feng out.

Bai Shaonan's expression turned dark. He vehemently denied that his heart quaked for an instant when he heard Qin Feng's name. He maintained that the only reason he stopped the teasing was out of displeasure that Cui Yue brought up another male ghost's name.

"Why do you keep bringing up Qin Feng for no reason?" Bai Shaonan was unhappy. He knew that Cui Yue had entered Qin Feng in his phone's contact list as "Underworld No. 1 Qin Feng the Great." He understood that, as a PIGS student, Cui Yue would no doubt unreasonably idolize Qin Feng to a degree, but now seemed as good a time as any to reclaim his position.

They were boyfriends, after all. How could he rank below Qin Feng in the little hotpot's heart?

"Because he really is more mature than you," Cui Yue took practically no time to answer. Ever since joining the Qin Feng cult, he and the other PIGS students would meet regularly to sing Qin Feng's praises. Every compliment there could be for a man was also a point of virtue for Qin Feng. He had already memorized them forward and backward.

Bai Shaonan decided to freeze Qin Feng's wages as soon as they got back, for at least half a year. This time, he wouldn't relent no matter how Qin Feng threatened him. However, there was another, even more important point of clarification to get out of the way. "Is he more handsome, or am I?"

Cui Yue puffed up his cheeks grumpily. They were outside and floating in midair—why would Bai Shaonan pick this timing to compare himself to Qin Feng?

Besides, Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng—how could he possibly compare them?

Bai Shaonan refused to let up unless Cui Yue answered properly. To this end, he even deigned to threaten with a "Little hotpot, if you don't answer, then I won't let go. In any case, it's fine if I get a little more sunlight, it'll just feel uncomfortable at most and won't lead to anything serious."

"You!" Cui Yue had been planning to drag the matter on until it went away, but Bai Shaonan was playing the guilt-trip card. "Uncomfortable at most"? Did he think Cui Yue wouldn't feel guilty for that?

Bai Shaonan really was the worst. Based on this line alone, he would absolutely say that Qin Feng was more handsome. The two ghosts were incomparable anyway, Cui Yue thought as his eyes met Bai Shaonan's petulant expression. He remained steadfast. "Of course Qin Feng is more handsome."

Bai Shaonan was rendered speechless. *Little hotpot, I dare you to say it again*! *Which one of us is your actual boyfriend*!

Bai Shaonan's resentful gaze fell on Cui Yue, making him feel an unbearable, yet completely unnecessary guilt. Cui Yue thought weakly, he wasn't wrong. Bai Shaonan was naturally not as handsome as Lord Qin. But the way things stood right now… why did it feel like he… had said the wrong thing?

As soon as his heart started doubting, his entire being doubted as well. Cui Yue dropped his eyes, adding with the tiniest mosquito-thin voice, "But… you're… more to my taste…"

One second Bai Shaonan was still angry about Cui Yue's words, but the next second, when he heard the next line, he couldn't help but giggle out loud. He was so happy that he almost let the sunlight touch Cui Yue.

"Heh heh heh heh heh heh…"

A faint laugh sounded in the two ghosts' ears. They turned toward the sound at the same time, and saw that the living spirit had turned around at some point and was laughing out loud at their obnoxious flirting.

"Ah, sorry. I wasn't peeking on purpose. It's just that you still hadn't caught up, so I thought something had happened," the girl explained, seeing the awkwardness on Cui Yue's face, and immediately went on, "I already checked the room. The nurse just finished making the rounds and won't be back anytime soon. Is that okay?"

Bai Shaonan cleared his throat gently, still holding the already stiffened Cui Yue. “No problem. It’ll be even better if no human comes in. We can just pull the curtains shut.”

“Ghosts can pull curtains?” The girl was surprised.

“Why not? If ghosts can throw plates around to scare people, of course we can pull curtains. You can think of us as a variation on poltergeists.”

In the hospital room, Cui Yue purposefully situated himself at the spot farthest away from Bai Shaonan, who surprisingly did not object and only glanced meaningfully at the little hotpot before sitting down in a chair closest to the hospital bed.

Lying on the bed was none other than the living spirit’s comatose body. Cui Yue immediately pursed his lips. After some internal struggle, he eventually floated back to Bai Shaonan’s side but not before scowling in silent protest.

The living spirit saw this and, with the pretense of checking the hallway, left the room to give them space. When she came back, Bai Shaonan’s chair was pulled far away from the bed with Cui Yue sitting on his lap looking like he’d given up on life, that is, if his upturned lips hadn’t given away a trace of his satisfaction.

“Sorry, miss, we’ve made you wait. We can start now.” Bai Shaonan put away the gleeful smile on his face. Showing off their love in front of a girl separated from her partner was… ahem, a little inappropriate.

“My name is Lü Lin. You can just call me xiao-Lin.” The living spirit of Lü Lin gave them a faint smile.

“Then, xiao-Lin, what’s the name of your partner?”

“Him? I’m not sure. We didn’t have need for names in our last life.”

“You weren’t humans in the previous lifetime?”

“That’s right.” As if remembering something, a wistful expression flashed across Lü Lin’s eyes. Her gentle female voice was a stark contrast to

the creatures she spoke of. “In our previous life, we were eagles, soaring and ruling over the sky.”

“No way; eagles are birds of prey, killing and ripping apart other animals their whole lives. They wouldn’t have let you reincarnate into a human,” Bai Shaonan immediately said. If one were to take a stroll around Judge Yanluo’s court, they would surely see the spirits of animals who’d been eaten as prey in their previous lives petitioning the Judge for a chance to eat the one that killed them in the next life.

“He was very good to me. He’d always go out to hunt for me; I never even had to leave the nest.” Lü Lin gave them an embarrassed smile. “To have only hunted a handful of times as a bird of prey, I probably brought shame on our whole species.”

Cui Yue blinked. He thought it was a uniquely human tradition to have the husband work hard to make money while the wife spent it casually. He didn’t expect that, in the raptor world, they had a similar tradition of the male working hard to hunt while the female sat in the nest waiting for food. Was “wife guy” also a growing trend in the animal kingdom?

Cui Yue looked down at the hand resting on his waist. He pledged to work hard in school and become an accomplished malevolent spirit. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be able to make money for Bai Shaonan to live on. As a man, it was only natural that Cui Yue slotted himself into the role of the husband, without considering the fact that Bai Shaonan did not need to be kept. Conversely, Bai Shaonan was already planning to fatten up his boyfriend nice and plump.

“I had lived well and died of old age in my previous life. I’d planned to wait for him at the Yellow Spring, but the ghostly guard who checked for me said that I might have to finish my next life before he could descend, and told me to not wait for him. I thought it made sense, so I agreed.

“I’d already forgotten all about him in this life as a human, but when I went into a coma four years ago after an accident, I remained bedridden but

my consciousness slowly left my body until, one day, I realized that I could leave the hospital room and even remember what happened in my last life.

"Recently, I heard the doctor say that my time here is ending soon, and that if my will is weak, I could go at any time. I thought that this was it, but somehow I got the sense that he's nearby. Maybe it's because I'm a living spirit, but I can't go very far. So for the last two weeks, I've been floating to more wide-open places, hoping to see him one last time before I leave.

"But I know, even if he's in this life, he would've forgotten about me." Lü Lin smiled bitterly. "When it comes down to it, it's just my inability to let go."

Bai Shaonan didn't waste his energy trying to console Lü Lin, and instead focused on the important point. "You got a 'sense'? As in?"

"My intuition has never failed me. Back then, I had many eagles pursuing me, and I set my sights on him right away." A fierce light glinted in Lü Lin's eyes as she said this, like a predator locking on her prey.

Cui Yue thought, despite her own admittance that she'd brought shame on their species, she clearly picked her mate with the sharp precision of a raptor capturing prey. Just look at the wife guy she picked out for herself.

Bai Shaonan asked for a few more details, and since it was before noon, when the yang energy would be at its peak, and Cui Yue was starting to show some signs of fatigue, they finished up and left.

"I will ask the Judge's court for you, but this requires time. Make sure you don't die before I come back to look for you."

"Of course. Thank you."

Back at the hotel, Cui Yue jumped immediately into the bed and fell dead asleep. It was no wonder he was so tired. Ghosts slept during the day and were active at night. As a good little ghostling, he was usually in bed at 11 a.m. at the latest. It took all his self-restraint to not outright yawn in front of Lü Lin.

Bai Shaonan couldn't help but shake his head and chuckle. This was the first time they were sleeping together after confirming their relationship, yet Cui Yue completely disregarded any fluster of feelings or skipping of the heart, opting instead to fall asleep right away. It was indeed the little hotpot's style. Although, Bai Shaonan was also tired. He quickly put up some protection talismans before getting into bed, falling asleep with his arms around Cui Yue.

If there was anything else, they could do it tonight. Or so Bai Shaonan thought. Sometime in the afternoon after five o'clock, he was woken up by Qin Feng and "politely" asked to leave the comfortable bed, forced to muster up the energy to attend an emergency meeting started by his own secretary.

Bai Shaonan didn't dare object. Qin Feng had been working nonstop since the day before and had not yet slept. If he dared protest, Qin Feng would surely make him experience the genuine wrath of a sleep-deprived employee.

"I went to check the spot where Cui Yue fainted today." Qin Feng could see how groggy Bai Shaonan was. He himself was tired too and would love to take a nap before starting work, but recalling who was waiting for him back in his room, he knew that if he went back, it would be difficult to come back out again.

In order to keep Cao Zhongnan from bugging him, Qin Feng had found a rope to tie him to the bed. Based on Cao Zhongnan's masochistic tendencies, he would never say no to games like this, allowing Qin Feng a chance to slip out the door. But just how wound-up Cao Zhongnan would be when Qin Feng returned was a point he refused to consider.

"Didn't the guards seal the place up?" Bai Shaonan asked. That was why he took Cui Yue on the long way around to get to the warehouse; he didn't want the guards to be notified about Cui Yue.

"They weren't there at noon; I snuck in." As the yet-to-be-debuted PIGS idol, Qin Feng obviously found sunlight inconsequential.

“Then what did you find?” Bai Shaonan knew that once Qin Feng set his sights on something, no ghost could stop him, and so didn’t waste time on reprimanding his disregard for safety.

“I found an abandoned laboratory—extremely clean with no materials of any sort left behind. Based on the equipment, it’s not too far off from our hypothesis. Cui Yue is an artificially created spirit, just like you.” Qin Feng showed Bai Shaonan some photos he had taken in the lab. The setup was similar to Bai Shaonan’s “home.” It would appear that whoever owned the lab, their research was in the same direction as Bai Qinghe’s.

“Don’t worry, the boundaries on that lab are top notch. It even took me some time to get inside. I closed it back up when I left; the guards won’t be able to find it.” This was a huge deal, enough to put Judge Yanluo’s court on alert. In the entirety of the underworld, only Bai Qinghe had such rights. Qin Feng’s conception was already the rarest of exceptions; the Judge certainly wouldn’t allow another such spirit to exist.

Furthermore, as Bai Shaonan suspected, Qin Feng was also inclined to think that the prodigy who made Cui Yue had been recruited by the Fu family. It was very possible that was the reason the lab was abandoned in the first place. Lately, the Fu family had been under close scrutiny by the Judge, and if anyone found out about the secret lab, they would surely gather all their resources to make sure anyone connected to the matter was exterminated.

“I’ve also verified on my end that little hotpot was sent intentionally to get close to me.” Bai Shaonan explained what happened at the warehouse before announcing with pride, “We’re together now.”

“Oh. So what’s your plan?” Qin Feng gave no emotional reaction whatsoever. If Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan were of the same origin, it was no wonder they were attracted to one another. With Bai Shaonan’s ability, he was naturally not worried about Cui Yue betraying him, and Qin Feng need

not be concerned about his boss losing his mind over love. If worse came to worst, there was still Qin Feng to clean up any potential mess.

"I plan to ask Father to examine the little hotpot," said Bai Shaonan matter-of-factly. With his technical proficiencies from creating Qin Feng, he could, in fact, examine Cui Yue on his own. But since the professional was right there, he would of course leave it to Bai Qinghe.

No doubt when the time came, he and Qin Feng would be standing right there to keep an eye on Bai Qinghe, in case he used the opportunity to cause trouble.

"Did you forget what happened at the casino hotel?" Qin Feng was quiet for a moment. The densest thing someone could do would be to ask the ghost with a crush on you to do a favor for your boyfriend. That's right, that someone was Bai Shaonan.

"If the guards let him go, it means that he's at least innocent for now. Besides, he's my father, after all. I've shunned him for some time now, and recently he's been desperate to make good with me again. This is his chance." If Cui Yue was considered thick in the head, Bai Shaonan was no better.

Qin Feng decided not to be a part of the Bai family drama hour; he would leave Cui Yue to experience the unique flavors of that on his own. To this end, Qin Feng decided to change the subject: "Your Ghostly Guard Junior called. He said they couldn't find anything about the number that called me claiming you were gravely injured. He said it's possible that 'Lovingly He' found someone to burn it down for him."

"I bet it's that half-human half-ghost." Bai Shaonan scoffed.

"According to the humans, he had a mental illness. The ghostly guards are still arranging for a dream interrogation," said Qin Feng.

"Oh, right. While you're there, do me a favor and look into a woman named 'Lü Lin.' She's still alive in the human realm." At the mention of guards, Bai Shaonan suddenly remembered the living spirit in the hospital.

"What's the matter? Since when are you so kindhearted?" There was no way that Qin Feng would believe Bai Shaonan's claim that he was helping out just because. These words were only sufficient to fool the likes of Cui Yue.

"If it really was just a coincidence that I ran into her, I can ask the Judge's court to view the reincarnation records. You know that when I make these requests, it has to go through the board first," said Bai Shaonan. The board had a collective surname of Fu and was a good entry point for his investigation. He couldn't go knock on their door without reason, but Lü Lin was a good excuse.

"I'm not going to stop you, but remember that the old geezers are only the tip of the iceberg. The real mastermind may be a ghost you've never met."

"Of course. Oh yeah, I heard about Cao Zhongnan's vow of taking you; did he succeed?" Bai Shaonan suddenly changed the topic with a teasing grin.

"Whether or not he's successful has nothing to do with you. If there's nothing else, I have to get back." Qin Feng floated away with his usual composure, but Bai Shaonan was left reeling in shock.

This was the first time that Qin Feng had avoided a topic by floating away from it, Bai Shaonan thought excitedly. Did this mean that there was finally a ghost capable of keeping Qin Feng in check?

He was seriously considering giving Cao Zhongnan an award. Not every ghost was blind enough to set their sights on Qin Feng and have the courage to pursue him. Even behind the cold-blooded exterior, Qin Feng was only an earnest and simple dude.

He was only three blades of grass, after all; how complex could he possibly be?

After the meeting with Qin Feng, Bai Shaonan was left wide awake. He sat down on the sofa to ponder the best way to go about testing the board

of directors. He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he didn't even notice when Cui Yue got up.

"Why are you not sleeping?" Cui Yue's voice sounded beside his ears. Bai Shaonan glanced at the clock—it was only a little past six o'clock. What was the little hotpot doing up so early?

"What's wrong? Did you have another bad dream?"

"No."

"Do you want to go back to bed and sleep a little more? I can wake you up when it's nine."

"That's okay; I won't be able to sleep tomorrow morning if I get up too late."

These last two days, under Bai Shaonan's deliberate guidance, Cui Yue had slowly gotten used to having another ghost by his side while he slept. He'd woken up earlier when Qin Feng came to drag his boss out of bed. Even though Bai Shaonan had quickly lulled him back to sleep, it naturally wasn't as comfortable without his body pillow. He'd dozed for a little while but eventually woke up again.

Of course, he'd never tell Bai Shaonan about this.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing. I finished the meeting with Qin Feng. Now I'm just thinking about some stuff."

"Then do you wanna go back to bed?"

"Nah, I won't be able to fall asleep."

Cui Yue glanced at Bai Shaonan skeptically. There was obviously a faint weariness on Bai Shaonan's face. Work was certainly important but so was adequate rest.

"But I want to sleep for a little longer. Do you want to sleep together?" Cui Yue knew he was incapable of forcing Bai Shaonan back to the bed, so he had no choice but to sacrifice himself. This way, Bai Shaonan probably wouldn't refuse.

"Didn't you just say that you're not going to sleep…" Bai Shaonan didn't catch the meaning behind Cui Yue's words as he answered. "But okay, of course you can; go ahead. I don't need to though. Don't worry, I'll wake you up."

"You're not going to come *with me*?" Cui Yue asked again. This time, he put emphasis on the crucial words. He might lash out if Bai Shaonan still didn't get it.

Bai Shaonan blinked. His first thought was that Cui Yue was inviting him for some R-rated activities, but looking at the little hotpot's determined and not at all bashful expression, he belatedly realized Cui Yue's actual motive.

"Yeah, I happen to be a little tired as well. Let's go to bed together," Bai Shaonan smiled and said, but inside he was overcome with sweetness. It really was different having a boyfriend. Qin Feng would only force him to do work with no regard for the time or occasion, while the little hotpot was concerned about his lack of sleep.

"My definition of sleep is lying down and closing your eyes!"

Soon, Cui Yue started squirming on the bed for no reason other than the fact that the sperms-for-brains idiot Bai Shaonan had actually misunderstood his intention! First, he was suddenly shoved down on the bed and kissed until he was dizzy, then while he was preoccupied, Bai Shaonan attempted to strip him of his pajamas.

If Cui Yue was with any other ghost, they might roll around in the sheets together and eventually do the deed despite Cui Yue's half-hearted objections. But his partner was Bai Shaonan, the same Bai Shaonan who was under surveillance of the Judge's court. Cui Yue might not have any experience, but he wasn't completely ignorant. His brain would have to be trampled by elephants to believe Bai Shaonan's claim that he could keep his heart rate at a steady pace even during intense exercise.

Since Bai Shaonan said that he could apply for a brief stay of the surveillance, then they would wait until then to think about these matters. Cui Yue was not so progressive that he'd want other ghosts to know when he lost his virginity. Because of all this, he'd rather die than let Bai Shaonan get his way.

"You can lie down and close your eyes, and leave all the moving to me." Though Bai Shaonan also didn't want to draw the Judge's attention to Cui Yue for the sake of his momentary pleasure, seeing the little hotpot struggle so hard, he couldn't help but tease him.

"That's not what I meant!" Cui Yue's voice got higher. His attention was split between talking to Bai Shaonan and avoiding those wandering hands. He didn't even notice that Bai Shaonan wasn't seriously trying to strip him but merely feigning the motions.

However, trapped beneath Bai Shaonan's body and squirming around in a limited space, Cui Yue's clothes had risen up amid the tussle, revealing his slim waist and its pale skin. Bai Shaonan's eyes darkened at the sight. If he wasn't trying so hard to control himself, he could pop a boner at any time.

But now, he was playing with fire and had only himself to blame.

"All right, I won't toy with you anymore. Go to sleep now." Bai Shaonan conjured up an image of Qin Feng in his mind to calm himself down. He pulled Cui Yue's clothes back before lying down on the left side of the bed, pulling the little hotpot into his arms.

Cui Yue blinked in surprise. He couldn't believe that Bai Shaonan would let him off so easily, but he would never look a gift horse in the mouth and also feared that any more questions from him would elicit more shameless responses from Bai Shaonan. They might have taken a detour, but he'd achieved his end goal of making sure Bai Shaonan got more sleep, and that was enough.

Bai Shaonan was very self-aware and had Cui Yue wrapped in his arm in a half embrace. When Cui Yue, with the idea of returning the favor, tried to hug him back, Bai Shaonan grabbed his little paw heartlessly and rejected any attempts at interaction.

"Hey, little sloth, no ghost treats their boyfriend as a tree branch," Bai Shaonan said in resignation. He only needed one experience of sleeping with his neck in a chokehold to know that it wasn't for him.

"Sorry." Cui Yue drew his arms back awkwardly.

"You can put your hand here." For the sake of future sleep quality, Bai Shaonan had no choice but to be hands-on with his instructions, teaching Cui Yue the correct way for lovers to sleep together.

After Cui Yue obediently adjusted his position, Bai Shaonan was finally able to doze for a while.

The next few days, Bai Shaonan stayed in the room most of the time, going through work under close supervision from Qin Feng. Occasionally, he'd bring Cui Yue on dates to scare a couple of cowardly humans as a way of spending some quality time together.

On their last day in the human realm, Qin Feng needed some private space to deal with top-secret work, so Cao Zhongnan was kicked off to the room next door. Having not seen the ghost for four whole days, Bai Shaonan couldn't help but frown from the flirtatiousness in his every move. Though, blind as Cui Yue was, he obviously didn't notice.

Cao Zhongnan spent half a day sitting around Bai Shaonan's room, watching the unusually tacit interaction between the two. It took only a single glance or the slightest movement for them to know what the other ghost was thinking. Even though Bai Shaonan would occasionally tease Cui Yue until he was red in the face, these two ghosts who claimed that they had recently just gotten together seemed to have skipped over the flustered honeymoon phase and practically lived like a harmonious old married couple, with the exception of their yet-to-be-synced taste buds.

Compared to his own love life filled with nothing but moans, Cao Zhongnan didn't know whether he should worry about the lack of passion in Cui Yue's romantic relationship, or about the lack of emotional engagement in his own physical one.

Finally, when Cao Zhongnan noticed that the two ghosts hardly spoke to each other even during the meal while still looking entirely at ease, he couldn't help but drag Cui Yue into the bedroom and instruct him on the guidelines of getting along with your significant other.

Remembering the antagonism from Bai Qinghe back at the casino hotel, Cao Zhongnan reached deep inside and attempted to teach Cui Yue everything he knew about seduction to make Bai Shaonan utterly devoted to him: how to seduce, lure, and draw his attention; how to ensure the other ghost was always thinking about him at any given point in time… and, if necessary, how to make sure he couldn't get out of bed the next evening.

Cui Yue refused without even considering it. When it came to bedtime, Bai Shaonan would always jump on him like a ravenous wolf. Every day they would duke it out like a hunter fighting off a fierce beast. He was tired enough. If he was any nicer to his boyfriend, Bai Shaonan wouldn't even wait for bedtime; he'd take any chance he could to slack off from work and wrap himself around Cui Yue instead.

As an exceptional boyfriend, he knew what he ought do was encourage Bai Shaonan to work diligently to meet the production quota of the underworld, contribute to the construction of a beautiful campus in hell, and provide a considerate and comfortable learning environment for the various deceased spirits. These were principles that Cui Yue abided by every day. When Bai Shaonan threatened Qin Feng with Cao Zhongnan, Qin Feng had come up with a *How to Be a Good Boyfriend* handbook for Cui Yue the very next day. He even handed it to Cui Yue right in front of his boyfriend's face.

Bai Shaonan knew very well Qin Feng's place in Cui Yue's mind. A new boyfriend could not possibly compare to the idol sitting high on his pedestal. Even if Qin Feng revealed one day that he was actually a she-ghost, Cui Yue would accept it as fact without question. That was why, when he saw Qin Feng hand the wretched guide to Cui Yue, he knew that it was all over.

He spent three whole hours that day trying to convince Cui Yue not to listen to Qin Feng, but Cui Yue refused to lend him an ear. He even advised Bai Shaonan to get some rest so he could get up earlier the next day for work.

"Look at this handbook Qin Feng the Great gave me. It states very clearly what to do to become an exceptional mate." Cui Yue shook his head after listening to Cao Zhongnan's advice. "I'll make a photocopy for you when we get back. If you follow this guide, you'll surely make Qin Feng the Great fall in love with you."

"Thanks, but no thanks." Cao Zhongnan declined the offer, suspecting that Qin Feng might be rolling around in the sheets so much with him that he'd gotten a little confused, writing "boyfriend" instead of "secretary" in the handbook for secretarial work, and giving a copy to Cui Yue by mistake.

"You really don't need it?" Cui Yue looked at Cao Zhongnan skeptically.

"No." Cao Zhongnan sighed. Looking at Cui Yue's pure and innocent eyes, he couldn't bring himself to say that he'd relied on only one thing to get to Qin Feng, and that was fucking.

"I'll make a copy for you first. I think what it says makes a lot of sense," Cui Yue continued to push his recommendation.

"That's not necessary. I'll just borrow it from you if I ever need it." Cao Zhongnan refused to accept the recommendation, especially when he saw the line "If work hasn't been done, you should decline any sexual offer from your mate and advise them to dedicate their energy to work instead of wasting it on matters of the lower body," which further cemented his belief.

To avoid disturbing Bai Shaonan, Cui Yue had closed the door before they came in, but it only made it convenient for the dean to eavesdrop. When he heard Cui Yue decline Cao Zhongnan's offer to teach him the art of seduction and instead attempted to drag the other ghost into the wretched handbook cult, he almost didn't manage to hold back his laughter. Meanwhile, Cao Zhongnan's complete and utter refusal from start to finish was also indicative of the recklessly immoral life he and Qin Feng must have led for the past few days.

His little hotpot was still naive; he couldn't let this pair of bad seeds corrupt Cui Yue.

"What are you doing?" When he was done with the top-secret work, Qin Feng dropped by to pick up his ghost. As soon as he floated in, he was met with the sight of Bai Shaonan hovering by the door like an idiot.

"I'm not doing anything, I'm just stretching." Bai Shaonan would never admit for the death of him that he was eavesdropping.

"Oh, is that so?" Having caught no sight of Cui Yue or Cao Zhongnan after glancing around the room, Qin Feng had a good idea of where they might be. He gave Bai Shaonan a meaningful look and said, "If you're done with stretching, maybe you can get back to work? Did you finish reading the co-op agreement with Egypt's Anubis University?"

"Half of it. I'm still working on it," Bai Shaonan answered without blinking. He couldn't possibly admit that he'd spent all his time on sneaking around and hadn't even taken a single look at the whatever agreement.

Qin Feng knew Bai Shaonan inside out. If he said "half," it meant that he hadn't even touched the thing. He adjusted his plans accordingly and suavely floated onto the sofa. "Hurry up and finish it. We have to burn the agreement to the other side tomorrow."

Seeing that Qin Feng planned to stay here and supervise him, Bai Shaonan could only give a pitiful response.

When they returned to the underworld, Bai Shaonan first accepted the ghostly guards' apology on behalf of Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan for the insufficient protection while in the human realm, then charged right up to Fu Zhaoyi's home with the intention of testing the ghost in person.

Fu Zhaoyi, who happened to be at home, was very surprised at Bai Shaonan's sudden visit. However, he didn't hesitate to instruct the housekeeper to lead the other ghost in. Considering Bai Shaonan's hatred of the board of directors, it must have been an important matter to bring him here of his own accord.

"Ah, you even brought a gift, Dean Bai," Fu Zhaoyi greeted Bai Shaonan in the living room, and was shocked to see that Bai Shaonan was holding the delicacies of the underworld: Ox-Head biscuits and Horse-Face cakes.

"Well, it's poor manners to show up to someone's house empty-handed." Before Fu Zhaoyi could speak, Bai Shaonan had already settled himself onto the sofa. Of course, he wasn't so generous as to buy gifts for these Fu family ghosts; these were given to him by the ghostly guards along with their apology.

Cui Yue was uninterested in the snacks, so Bai Shaonan had brought them here.

"To what do I owe this pleasure, Dean Bai?" Fu Zhaoyi was not interested in small talk with Bai Shaonan.

"I want to view a certain living spirit's reincarnation records. According to protocol, it needs at least one board member's signature." Bai Shaonan tossed the document onto the coffee table with an attitude that said he wouldn't leave until it was signed.

"Oh? And you thought of me immediately because you think I have a kind heart and would definitely sign it for you?" Fu Zhaoyi looked at Bai Shaonan with a certain glint in his eyes.

"No, it's only because you live the closest to me. If you won't do it, I'll go find that Niaojue or whatever. I haven't even seen what the ghost looks

like." Fu Zhaoyi's question was to test whether he'd become the number-one decision maker since Fu Wanli's demise. It might be true, but Bai Shaonan would never give him that pleasure.

"What do you need the records for?" Anger flashed across Fu Zhaoyi's face, but he couldn't take it out on Bai Shaonan. If Fu Zhaoyi chased him away now, and the next Fu family ghost greeted him with a warm welcome, then there would be no question who Bai Shaonan would favor in the future.

"To do some good—help a sad woman find the whereabouts of her husband," Bai Shaonan said simply. He knew that Fu Zhaoyi would agree. After all, he'd just recently ascended to the position as the head of the board. If he was able to appease Bai Shaonan, it would only benefit his standing.

"It's difficult to imagine that you have such compassion."

"I have always had a penchant for humanitarian aid, unlike you infamous Fu ghosts so renowned that you've become the target of assassinations." Bai Shaonan was still lounging back on the sofa, but only he knew that the real test had begun.

"I seem to remember that a student has been targeted as well?" Fu Zhaoyi chuckled as he reminded Bai Shaonan, "It appears that you've been clouded by personal grudges and forgotten the intrinsic nature of the problem."

"Hmph. Isn't it precisely because of you, Fu Zhaoyi, that he's been targeted in the first place?"

Bai Shaonan's gaze abruptly cooled down as he casually tossed out a huge bomb.

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"What's that supposed to mean?" Fu Zhaoyi didn't stir an inch, but his gaze became sharp, as if trying to find a clue to Bai Shaonan's behavior.

"Hmn. You know exactly what I mean." *The old fox*, Bai Shaonan cursed in his mind. As expected, he couldn't draw anything out of the old geezer with just one sentence.

"Forgive my bluntness, Dean Bai—normally I don't mind, but this is a very serious accusation to make out of nowhere. I can't just pretend that I didn't hear it." Fu Zhaoyi took the offensive and attempted to force the truth out of Bai Shaonan.

"Make out of nowhere? My student was targeted only because he'd met you that one time. If you hadn't come running to U of U NHC, how else could 'Lovingly He' possibly set his sights on a bottom-of-the-barrel slacker?" Bai Shaonan brought out his prepared speech. As for whether Fu Zhaoyi believed him, that was another matter entirely. He even intended on visiting every single one of the board members in the guise of getting a few more signatures just in case. In reality, he planned to hit them all with the "truth" that Fu Zhaoyi had dragged Cui Yue down with him. Whether it was true or not, it would be enough to create a rift between them.

"Now you're really reaching. Perhaps that student… has a connection to the murderer?" It was a well-hidden secret that Cui Yue was targeted only because of Bai Shaonan, and other ghosts such as Fu Zhaoyi only knew that one of the students had been randomly implicated.

"Bullshit. My students are all good kids. They'd never associate with such lowlife." Bai Shaonan couldn't stand for anyone slandering Cui Yue and immediately rebuked.

"So you decided to pin the blame on me? Well, aren't I lucky." Fu Zhaoyi smiled in resignation. "I'm willing to swear on the Judge's court, Dean Bai, that I really have nothing to do with your student. If there's anything untrue about my oath, then I will be the next target of 'Lovingly He.' How's that?"

"It better be true." Bai Shaonan scoffed. He might not have gotten anything useful, but having forced Fu Zhaoyi to swear on the Judge's court was better than nothing.

"Heh heh, you really are like Bai Qinghe. Once he's decided on something, no ghost can make him change his mind." Fu Zhaoyi suddenly diverted the topic. "Since you've been abiding by the rules recently and avoiding contact with him, here, I'll sign this request for you."

"We're father and son; of course we're alike," Bai Shaonan answered reflexively.

"Back then, you insisted that the bed should be white, so he went looking all over to find a white bed for you. You mistook some other ghost's dog as a cat, so he went and forced the ghost to admit that they actually had a cat. You wrote his name wrong, so he went straight to the Judge's court and had his name changed." Fu Zhaoyi accepted the reading glasses handed to him by the housekeeper and chatted casually as he looked through the papers.

"Had his name changed? How come I didn't know about this?"

"You were still young then, so no wonder you don't remember. Originally, his name wasn't 'He' as in 'river' with the water radical, but 'He' as in the one with the human radical. You'd written it wrong, so he got it changed." Fu Zhaoyi handed the signed document back to Bai Shaonan, his face as indifferent as before.

"What's that supposed to mean, Fu Zhaoyi?" Bai Shaonan's expression darkened. Of course he knew what Fu Zhaoyi meant. He was implying that Bai Qinghe was the real ghost behind "Lovingly He," a ghost who used the human radical in the character of their signature.

"It doesn't mean a thing. I'm just chatting with you about old times." Fu Zhaoyi's answer betrayed nothing. It was true, he'd even brought up two other unrelated events. It was as he said—just "old times."

Bai Shaonan rudely snatched back the documents and turned to leave the room without so much as a goodbye. Fu Zhaoyi laughed as he remarked to the housekeeper behind him, "He wants to draw it out of me? With that? Heh."

The housekeeper made no reply, instead handing Fu Zhaoyi a report. "Master, this was just sent in by the bodyguards."

Fu Zhaoyi did a cursory flip through, but when he saw what was written in the document, he grew so furious that he tore the pages up. "How dare he! I want you to dig into this, dig hard!"

Bai Shaonan sent a message to Ghostly Guard Junior as soon as he left Fu Zhaoyi's house, telling him to keep a close eye on Bai Qinghe. Then, with "gratitude" in mind, he proceeded to visit each of the other four board members' homes. Since Fu Wanli's and Fu Junzhan's deaths, they'd been advised by the ghostly guards to stay close to safety and not run around; therefore Bai Shaonan was fortunate enough to see them all in person instead of leaving a message with their papier-mâché dolls.

After the board chair Fu Wanli died, each one of the board had wanted to take his place, but Fu Zhaoyi got there first. They all demonstrated significant excitement in response to the theory Bai Shaonan brought before them. The most excited of them was Fu Ruofei, who couldn't contain his glee at all. Bai Shaonan managed to draw lots of information out of him.

During all this, he received a response from Ghostly Guard Junior promising not only to follow up but also to send extra guards to keep an eye on Bai Qinghe. Bai Shaonan's heart, which had been happy as he drove Fu Zhaoyi into a corner, sank once more. After all, nobody wanted to see their relatives become a criminal, even if they were ghosts.

Even though Fu Zhaoyi was only hinting at it, and even though Bai Qinghe might, in fact, be innocent, Bai Shaonan knew the old fox Fu Zhaoyi would not make idle small talk with him for no reason.

After hearing the accusation, Bai Shaonan had almost run straight to Bai Qinghe's home to question him. The little hotpot was Bai Shaonan's significant other. Though Bai Qinghe was his father, not only did he fail to be happy for his son for finally coupling up, he wanted to annihilate the ghost in such a manner that he wouldn't even have a chance at reincarnation. Why?

But if Bai Qinghe would admit to it, he wouldn't have tried to hide his identity in the first place. So in order to avoid alerting Bai Qinghe, he had to continue to the other board members' homes before going to the Judge's court to submit his request.

Fu Zhaoyi's words were enough to get him in a mood, but little did he know, there was worse waiting for him at home.

The first thing Bai Shaonan saw when he opened the door was Cui Yue standing in the doorway, his pale limbs exposed while a red apron unsuccessfully tried to cover his body. "You're back… do you want to shower and eat breakfast first… or eat… me?" he asked in a half-awkward and half-coy voice.

Bai Shaonan froze on the spot before quickly slamming the door shut. What, was he supposed to keep the door wide open so all the other ghosts could get a view of the beauty that was the little hotpot?

"Can I choose the third one?" Bai Shaonan grabbed Cui Yue's nervous hands. What was going on today? Was the sky about to rain blood? Why

would Cui Yue, who resisted his advances with deadly determination only a few days ago, willingly, and invitingly, dress like this?

"Of course, but you—HEY HEY HEY!" Cui Yue was so shy that he kept his head down the whole time. When Bai Shaonan picked him up bridal style, he yelped loudly in surprise.

"Shhh, it'll be fine," Bai Shaonan consoled him instinctively as he dashed straight into the bedroom. It wasn't that he didn't notice Cui Yue's unusually stiff limbs or the ghostling's odd behavior, but in this situation, there was absolutely nothing else he wanted to think about except to go for it.

"No, I wasn't finished…" Cui Yue wanted to cry but no tears would come. It'd only been a fraction of a second, but he'd already been thrown onto the bed. He didn't even have a chance to mention the most important point. How was Bai Shaonan so quick!?

"Mm-hmm, it's okay. You don't need to finish, I understand." Bai Shaonan swiftly climbed into bed. If he missed this chance, who knew when the next would come. In a rare turn of events, Cui Yue had given his consent, so was he supposed to go finish a whole meal before coming back to this?

"Listen to me first… mmmm!" Cui Yue attempted to struggle free, but Bai Shaonan sealed him with a kiss. If the little hotpot was dizzy with desire, he wouldn't be able to think about anything else.

As they struggled back and forth, Cui Yue's little tongue was already entangled with Bai Shaonan's, and his eyes glazed. The apron that normally never got a second glance now looked more alluring than anything. A triumphant smile slipped onto Bai Shaonan's face, and just as his hand was about to brush against Cui Yue's skin, he unexpectedly touched a material with an oddly familiar texture.

More precisely, it was the texture of a special kind of fabric he would often encounter during his missions. It was usually thrown at him by those

arrogant humans who dreamed of capturing him to keep as their phantom minion.

"Can you explain to me, little hotpot, why you're wearing a flesh-colored bodysuit made of ghost-trapping material?" Bai Shaonan didn't want to admit it, but the instant he felt the ghost-trapping fabric, he'd gone soft.

"Mm… ah… what did… you say?" Cui Yue was still drunk from the kiss. He stared dumbly at Bai Shaonan, but inside, he still had time for a fleeting thought: *Yes, my boyfriend really is hot.*

"I said, why do you have this suit?" Bai Shaonan patiently asked again.

"Ah. Didn't I say that I wasn't finished talking?" Cui Yue came back to his senses and protested. Then, he turned his head and quietly said something that made Bai Shaonan's eyes twitch. "If you want… to eat… me, then first finish writing that opening speech for the Twentieth Academic Seminar of Historical Ghosts for the day after tomorrow."

Bai Shaonan was absolutely speechless.

"Qin Feng said he ghostwrote it for you the last nineteen times. He doesn't want to do it anymore."

"Little hotpot, when did you start hooking up with Qin Feng?"

"We didn't hook up; he just wanted me to check on your progress." Cui Yue snuck a glance at Bai Shaonan. The progress chart really was pitiful, so no wonder Qin Feng wanted to go through him and force Bai Shaonan to finish his work.

Bai Shaonan was quiet. Ghost-trapping fabrics had a terrible feature: once the target was trapped, it would be impossible to take off except by the owner, who had a personalized method of releasing the fabric.

That asshole Qin Feng was using the little hotpot to bait him into doing work!

Did he think that Bai Shaonan would yield because of this? Definitely not! Even if he couldn't have sex with the little hotpot, he could still hold him while they slept. Things wouldn't go according to Qin Feng's plans!

"What needs to happen to undo the ghost-trapping fabric?"

"The opening ceremony remarks need to be sent to Qin Feng."

Bai Shaonan went quiet again. He had a feeling that even if he sent Qin Feng the speech, not only would he not receive the undoing technique, he would probably be asked to do even more work.

Cui Yue saw that Bai Shaonan's expression took a turn for the worse, and couldn't help but shrink a little. He felt bashful wearing only a skintight bodysuit and an apron, but when he saw the evidence of how diligently his boyfriend worked to avoid work (just as Qin Feng had claimed he would), he had to grit his teeth and follow the advice in the handbook. He needed to inject some "energy" into Bai Shaonan's work habits.

When Qin Feng handed him the ghost-trapping fabric, Qin Feng promised him that as long as Bai Shaonan didn't finish the speech, he would not hand over the undoing technique and Cui Yue need not worry about being swallowed up whole. It was because of this promise that he'd had the courage to stand in the doorway.

Though, from the looks of it, his plan had failed. Never mind making Bai Shaonan go back to work, what he wanted most right now was to curse himself.

"Hey, little hotpot, don't just listen to everything Qin Feng says." Seeing the unease grow on Cui Yue's face, Bai Shaonan immediately indicated with a gentle tone that he wasn't angry.

"But— But you should finish your work," Cui Yue said weakly.

Bai Shaonan pursed his lips in resignation. Fine, he had a penchant for dragging his feet when it came to most things. Whenever possible, he'd leave the work until the last minute, like that stupid opening speech. To be quite honest, he hadn't been planning to start thinking about what to say until five hours before the opening ceremony.

On the other hand, Qin Feng was the kind of ghost who preferred to get everything done well in advance. He'd always looked down on Bai

Shaonan's habits, and now he'd even found an ally in Cui Yue so the two of them could look down on him together.

"All right, all right, all right. I'll go do it now." Bai Shaonan gave Cui Yue a kiss. Since he couldn't have the little hotpot for breakfast, he had to settle for getting in as many kisses as he could.

"Mm-hmm, I'm cheering for you."

"I'm going to talk to Qin Feng. You should get the suit off later, that ghost-trapping fabric is too stuffy." Bai Shaonan pinched Cui Yue's cheek and said, "I won't touch you if you don't want me to, no need to worry about that. You'll feel more comfortable switching back to your pajamas."

Cui Yue's heart warmed at that, and a smile reached his eyes. "Okay, got it."

Bai Shaonan was fast at work that entire day, making his way through the bulk of his piled-up to-dos from the last few days. Qin Feng was very satisfied at the result and sent Cui Yue the newly updated work progress chart with high praise for his contribution. He then sent a few more paragraphs with a central message reminiscent of Sun Yat-sen's famous words: "Revolution has not yet prevailed. Comrades, keep up the good work!" In other words, he was urging Cui Yue to continue working to push Bai Shaonan to greater heights.

Cui Yue was no doubt thrilled to receive affirmations from the cult leader himself. He didn't hesitate for a second before selling Bai Shaonan out. Not only did he take a screenshot of the message, he even sent a response right back: *of course, no problem, just let me know the next time Bai Shaonan is being lazy.*

As soon as he received Cui Yue's reply, Qin Feng smirked, took his own screenshot, and sent it to the problematic ghost in question. Qin Feng also used this opportunity to issue a warning: don't even think of dropping work and running away on a whim again in the future. Bai Shaonan was so furious he almost demanded someone to burn him a flower so he could

pluck its petals and check whether the one Cui Yue loved was him or Qin Feng.

A few days had passed when Bai Shaonan received a notice from the Judge's court telling him his request to view the reincarnation records had been approved. However, his request to temporarily shut off his surveillance was still under review. He had no idea why it would take so long to review a request to make love. Qin Feng had just told him that Lü Lin's background was clean, so he immediately put his work to the wayside and set off for the Reincarnation Archive. He first checked Lü Lin's records and then her partner's.

After committing the information to memory, Bai Shaonan was planning to go straight to Lü Lin, except Cui Yue had also been involved at the beginning, so he casually asked if the little hotpot wanted to go along. Bai Shaonan was only going through the motions, but it happened to be a Saturday with no classes, so Cui Yue answered yes right away. As a result, Bai Shaonan headed home from the Judge's court to personally pick the ghostling up.

When the two ghosts arrived at the hospital, Lü Lin was thrilled to see them. Those hawk-like eyes of hers widened instantly as she looked at them, as though she was seeing prey she was about to scarf down.

"If I might ask, is there news?" Bai Shaonan had warned her before that it could take a very long time, so Lü Lin had prepared herself to wait for as long as a year. Naturally, she was beside herself with excitement to see him back so soon.

"I don't know if this is good news or bad news." For once, Bai Shaonan was not straightforward with his answer. He knew where the other eagle was, of course, but he wanted to make sure that Lü Lin was mentally prepared to hear it.

"What's wrong?" Lü Lin pursued. Cui Yue also looked at Bai Shaonan in confusion. Bai Shaonan hadn't told him anything along the way, so he

wasn't aware of the specifics either.

"Is it past the time for nurses' rounds?" Bai Shaonan didn't answer her directly.

"Yes, there'll be no one else here for the next three hours." Since Bai Shaonan continued to be so vague, Lü Lin could tell that things might not be what she'd hoped. She had since calmed down and decided to follow Bai Shaonan's lead.

"I'll just say it, then. After checking the reincarnation records, I found your husband's whereabouts. He will probably be a frog in his next life." Bai Shaonan gave Lü Lin a look, and emphasized, "*Probably.*"

"What did he do?" Knowing how her partner was, Lü Lin could tell that he must have caused trouble.

"Nothing much. He dived into the Reincarnation Archive at top speed, as an eagle, and dug up your whereabouts in a record time of ten seconds. This would've warranted a punishment, but his speedy record finding impressed the Judge, who suggested that he serve as a ghostly guard for three hundred years in exchange for his exoneration. But he refused. Do you know why?" asked Bai Shaonan.

"Is… it because of me?"

"He said that his wife has reincarnated as a human, so he wants to be a human. However, he was an eagle in his previous life, so even if the Judge had mercy and allowed it, his animal victims from the previous life wouldn't have let it go. Unfortunately, he wouldn't listen. Still he begged and pleaded, even offering up his next ten lifetimes so he could get a glimpse of you as a human in this life." Bai Shaonan paused when he got to this part since Lü Lin was already crying by now.

Cui Yue looked around anxiously, but after he finally found some tissue, he remembered that living spirits had no use for them. He then hurriedly pulled out an unused handkerchief from his pocket and handed it over.

"Sorry, I was too overwhelmed. Please continue." Lü Lin didn't take Cui Yue's handkerchief, and instead haphazardly wiped her tears with her sleeve. She quickly suppressed the urge to tear up and composed herself again.

"The Judge was moved by his perseverance and made an exception for him. He was allowed to not drink Mengpo's soup and to return as a human in this life. In exchange, he would live for less than five years in each of his next ten lifetimes, after which he'll serve as a ghostly guard for the Judge's court for three hundred years. This was about a month ago."

"He's been reborn?"

"Yes. As he wished, he was born in Wentai Hospital two weeks ago. It's about an hour away from here." Bai Shaonan looked at Lü Lin, who had charged outside but was immediately bounced back. "As I mentioned, even with the Judge's permission, the animals he'd killed wouldn't let him off so easily, and he was born plagued by potent curses.

"He developed a heart problem. Even if he makes it through, he won't live to adulthood."

"How can this be…" Lü Lin's tears fell from her eyes. If Cui Yue hadn't caught her in time, she also might have fallen right through the floor to the level below.

"You have two choices right now. One, you can end your life and go visit him. In his current unconscious state, no doubt he'll be able to see you. If you do that, he definitely won't be able to hang on and would decide to go with you, which will begin his next ten lives of less than five years each. The second option is you don't go see him, and he'll keep hanging on in order to search for you. This way, he'll be able to live a little longer." Bai Shaonan sighed to himself. Neither were very good options; she could only choose the less painful one.

Lü Lin finally couldn't hold it in anymore and burst out crying. However, the two ghosts weren't able to do anything except watch from beside her. Any attempt at consolation would be overshadowed by the stark

reality, especially since Bai Shaonan had been the one to make her cry like this.

Cui Yue lowered his eyes, allowing Lü Lin to lean weakly against his arm. His heart felt heavy, but he also knew that it couldn't possibly be heavier than the pain she felt.

After half an hour, Lü Lin lifted her red and puffy eyes, saying to Bai Shaonan in a determined voice, "At the end of the day, I'm a selfish woman. I want to go see him and then we'll leave together. At least we can look at each other one more time before the next reincarnation."

Bai Shaonan nodded. "That isn't selfishness. Letting him go his whole life with no hope of finding you, that's selfish."

Since Lü Lin made her decision, she transformed from a living spirit to a ghost in the blink of an eye. She had wanted to leave straight away, but Bai Shaonan held her back. Recently deceased souls were a magnet for impurities. And with Cui Yue, who was already a target, a group of ghosts setting out like this was no different than some deer prancing straight into a den of hungry lions.

Bai Shaonan might have the confidence to get rid of any interference, but he wanted to be extra safe, just in case. He insisted on staying in the hospital for at least three more hours so Lü Lin could gain a little more ghost age. There were plenty of new ghosts here, so one more wouldn't be a big deal.

Even so, Bai Shaonan still made a lap around the hospital for safety's sake, making sure no thoughtless malevolent spirits would suddenly pop up out of nowhere.

Since Lü Lin had passed on, several medical staff had gathered in the hospital room to deal with the aftermath. Cui Yue held the various protection artifacts Bai Shaonan stuffed into his arms and hovered in a corner of the hallway with Lü Lin. Her mood was still heavy but she didn't forget that Cui Yue had helped her. She knew better than to leave the ghost

to the side to stare at the ceiling by himself, and so offered to hold half of the artifacts for him and struck up a conversation. “He’s so good to you. How long have you been together?”

Cui Yue paused for second, only realizing half a beat later she was talking about Bai Shaonan. “Less than a month,” he answered truthfully, blushing a little.

There was surprise on Lü Lin’s face. Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan didn’t look at all like new lovers; they seemed more like a pair of husbands who’d been together for many years, occasionally teasing each other a little for added flavor. She realized her reaction was slightly inappropriate and quickly suppressed her shock. “Then you must really like him.”

“No.” Unexpectedly, Cui Yue shook his head. He also didn’t know why he was saying this to Lü Lin, whom he’d only met twice. Even when Cao Zhongnan kept pursuing the same line of questioning, he wouldn’t tell his roommate everything. Perhaps he found it too hard to lie while being stared at by a former champion of the skies. “It’s him… who really likes me.”

Confusion flashed across Lü Lin’s eyes. “You mean you’re only with him because he likes you?”

“He had a crush on me first.” Cui Yue nodded before quietly saying, “I-I was moved by him and agreed to it… I… like him too.”

Lü Lin’s expression turned a little strange. The way Cui Yue looked at Bai Shaonan, there was clearly deep affection in those eyes. Could he be unaware of his own feelings?

Secretly judged by Lü Lin, Cui Yue went on to add, “Don’t tell him though. He— He doesn’t realize that he’s so obsessed with me.”

Lü Lin was quiet now. She couldn’t help but feel sorry for Bai Shaonan. If her significant other behaved like this, she would have clawed him out long ago.

Bai Shaonan returned just then, and Lü Lin and Cui Yue tacitly ended the conversation. Seeing the two ghosts hovering in the hallway as though

they were being punished, Bai Shaonan led them to the guest lounge of the hospital's CEO to wait. They killed some time there, when suddenly a ghostly guard came by to take Lü Lin to the underworld to prepare for reincarnation.

Bai Shaonan sneered at him in response. "Hmph, you guys ignore the malevolent spirits traipsing about illegally, but rushed here to take away a new ghost? Since when have the ghostly guards had this new add-on service?"

The guard didn't react to the taunt, instead maintaining the original statement: "We have a responsibility to ensure that all deceased spirits can successfully move on to the next life."

"There are lots of ghosts in the underworld who still haven't entered reincarnation. Why don't you go deal with them first? Like that Fu family, for example?"

Bai Shaonan was not a force to be trifled with. Judge Yanluo's court might have approved his request, but they also worried that he might have ulterior motives. Because of this, as soon as they discovered that there was a new ghost by his side, they immediately sent a guard to break them up.

Lü Lin also spoke up. "Sorry, I don't plan on reincarnating just yet. If you insist, officer, I'll have to ask Dean Bai to call a lawyer."

She didn't spend the three hours of waiting in vain; Bai Shaonan had been telling her about the basic workings of the underworld. However, he was more or less biased against the Fu family, so everything he said insinuated that the underworld was trying to actively keep Lü Lin and her significant other apart. Cui Yue had even interrupted, saying there was no way the Judge's court had so much time on their hands, but it seemed Bai Shaonan's rhetoric immediately came into use.

The ghostly guard was a little alarmed. He didn't think a freshly passed ghost would be so familiar with the laws of the underworld. But the real distressing part was her line "ask Dean Bai to call a lawyer." Lawyers were

not a problem, but a lawyer called here by Bai Shaonan would be incredibly problematic. Anything involving Bai Shaonan would increase exponentially in difficulty.

"I'll have to take a statement first. Please have a representative come and explain why you can't go," the ghostly guard conceded, but he strategically set his sights on the ghost who looked easiest to intimidate and draw information from. "Sir, if you can please step out with me for a few minutes."

As soon as the guard homed in on Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan immediately blew up. "Why him?! I'll give you the statement!"

The guard offered his long-winded reasoning: "Based on your prejudices against certain colleagues of the Judge's court, Dean Bai, forgive me for not trusting your statement to be unbiased."

Bai Shaonan was about to curse the ghost out, when Cui Yue took over. "Sure, but I'm a protected ghost in a case and can't be too far from Dean Bai at any given time."

This time, the guard didn't hide his blatant misery. Cui Yue's words reminded him of the recent protective assignment that resulted in a major blow to the ghostly guards' reputation. He hadn't realized the ghost before him right now happened to be their former charge.

After some back-and-forth, Bai Shaonan finally agreed for the guard to take Cui Yue's statement with the condition that they would conduct the interview at one end of the hallway while Bai Shaonan and Lü Lin kept watch from the other end.

Cui Yue promised them that he wouldn't be misled by the guard into saying the wrong thing, but Bai Shaonan knew him too well to believe that. Meanwhile, the ghostly guard stood there, eyes looking skyward. Sure, he had planned on getting information, but at most he wanted to find out the true reason behind Bai Shaonan's interaction with this she-ghost, so why

were the other two ghosts looking like they were preparing for a courtroom battle?

By the end, the guard was forced to promise that he would only ask about this current situation and nothing more. Bai Shaonan finally yielded and temporarily dismissed the idea of filing a complaint after this was over.

As Cui Yue and the guard floated to the other end of the hallway, Bai Shaonan still looked unusually nervous. Seeing this, Lü Lin tried to assuage his anxiety. "He'll be fine."

It would be impolite to not respond when a lady was speaking to him, so he answered, "He's too dense. If he were sold off, he'd still help count the money."

"He'll learn, just give him some time," Lü Lin said with the hindsight of someone who'd been through it before.

"All this time and he still hasn't learned. He doesn't even know how much he likes me," Bai Shaonan grumbled.

This Lü Lin agreed with wholeheartedly, as she also replied quietly, "You're quite right about that."

Having received positive reinforcement from Lü Lin, Bai Shaonan couldn't help but complain some more. "If it wasn't for how much he likes me, I wouldn't be caught dead being with a ghost like him. Having to worry about every little thing day after day—who has the energy for that?"

Lü Lin was taken aback. By the time she snapped out of it, the question was already out of her mouth. "You mean Mr. Cui was the one who liked you first?"

"Of course. How would I have fallen for him otherwise?" Bai Shaonan said confidently, not noticing the gossip-mongering look on Lü Lin's face.

Lü Lin's eyebrows furrowed into a little hill on her face. What was wrong with this pair of lovers? They both thought the other ghost was obsessed with them first, and seemed to have only agreed to be together on the basis of giving in to the other's pursuit. What kind of interactions and

misunderstandings could have independently led both of them to form such bizarre conclusions?

Bai Shaonan only realized he said something wrong after the words were out of his mouth, and hurried to add, "Of course, since I chose him, it naturally means that I'm not *not* fond of him."

Lü Lin struggled internally for a moment, but in the end, her selfishness gained the upper hand. She worried that if she pointed out the truth, he and Cui Yue might get into a fight that would affect their subsequent travel arrangement. She mentally kowtowed to Bai Shaonan as she said out loud, "Don't worry, I won't tell Mr. Cui."

Meanwhile, the guard gathered the gist of the situation and let them go, but not before saying that he would keep following them to stay updated on how things progressed. For Bai Shaonan, so long as the ghostly guards were not there to cause trouble, he didn't mind having an extra tail. He even asked Cui Yue what they talked about right in front of the guard. The overprotective mother-hen bit successfully pissed off the ghostly guard and made Lü Lin shake her head in silent laughter.

Three hours passed by very quickly. When Bai Shaonan finally gave word that they could leave the hospital, Lü Lin's calm exterior gave way to apprehension.

With a new ghost by their side, Cui Yue followed Bai Shaonan very closely, having experienced several attacks in the past. His eyes darted around nervously, and any time there was the slightest sign of trouble, he would loudly shout Bai Shaonan's name.

Having Cui Yue clutch tightly onto his arm as though he was the only ghost in the world capable of supporting the little hotpot, Bai Shaonan was so overjoyed that he could ascend right then and there. Naturally, he would never tell Cui Yue that no ghost in their right mind would dare sidle up to them with the ghostly guard as their tail.

As he expected, the deceased spirits drifting along the streets automatically got out of the way at the sight of the guard. Any ghost still lingering around Wentai Hospital refusing to descend into the underworld practically rolled out the red carpet and tossed out flowers when they heard that a ghostly guard was on his way.

The four ghosts quickly arrived at their destination, and as soon as they did, Lü Lin hurriedly broke rank and headed straight for the NICU. Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue exchanged a look and sped up to float after her.

When they arrived in the NICU, and before Bai Shaonan could open his mouth, Lü Lin immediately recognized one of the infants with an especially weak heartbeat as her partner from the previous life. Seeing the tiny body more emaciated than a normal infant and the life support equipment nearby, Lü Lin broke down on the spot. Her tears wouldn't stop flowing, and her cries were full of anguish and despair. She wanted to reach out and touch the infant but stopped herself, afraid that her ghostly energy would only increase his suffering.

Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue stayed back, not to give Lü Lin space but because her emotions were so intense that even the busy nurses seemed unsettled by the faint sounds of a ghost crying. In response, Bai Shaonan quickly gave Cui Yue a brief hands-on lesson on the technique of vision obscuring. Of course, this time they weren't obscuring vision, but hearing.

The ghostly guard glanced at Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue, then back at Lü Lin. He lamented to himself about karmic fate before turning to cast hints on every infant, making sure the cries of the ghost wouldn't startle them from their sleep.

Lü Lin's face was covered in tears. She hovered by the crib and watched the baby for a while before saying in a hoarse voice, "Didn't you say that we'll still be together in the next life? Do you think that I'd be happy to see what you've done to yourself? How are we supposed to be together now…"

Though his eyes were still tightly shut, the unconscious infant seemed to react faintly to Lü Lin's words. His fingers twitched ever so slightly. If Lü Lin didn't happen to be staring at that finger right at that moment, her misty eyes surely wouldn't have noticed the movement.

Lü Lin's heart jumped and her eyes widened. She was so tense that her words jumbled as she spoke. "You— Your finger heard what I said? Move again, say something, move again."

As if he understood her, the baby's finger twitched again. Lü Lin sucked in a breath but also now knew that he was already one foot in the grave. Otherwise he couldn't have heard what she said.

"I've come to see you. My years in this lifetime have come to an end. I'm about to go to the underworld and then into reincarnation." Watching her partner struggle so hard to cling to life, she suddenly couldn't bring herself to say, "*Come with me.*" After all, she was only his partner in a previous lifetime; she was in no position to ask him to give up all of his subsequent lives.

It was enough that she saw him. A fateful romantic connection existed between them, so they would surely meet again.

The baby's finger twitched again, but unfortunately, Lü Lin couldn't understand what he was trying to say. She wanted to give him a smile, encourage him to live well, but her tears only grew heavier the more she wiped at them despite her intent.

Lü Lin bowed her head, closed her eyes, and took in a deep breath, forcing herself to calm down. Just as she'd settled her emotions and was about to conjure up a reluctant smile, a familiar touch suddenly brushed across her cheek. She froze and, looking up, saw an eagle standing before her, rubbing against her face with the few lingering feathers sticking out of his head, attempting to console her.

Her emotions, briefly repressed, burst through the dams once more. Lü Lin reached out and hugged the eagle in front of her. Sometimes, eternal

love was not just for humans; as long as both sides were devoted to each other, love existed even between beasts and birds.

Lü Lin was bawling so hard that her souls were becoming slightly unstable. Bai Shaonan had to step in between them at one point to force her to calm down.

Seeing Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue draw close, Lü Lin released the eagle she'd been holding and said to them with tears in her eyes, "Look at this, look how bald my husband's become. He used to have such a full head of feathers…"

The eagle stiffened. Was Lü Lin in such a miserable state because she was upset at his lack of feathers?

He hadn't wanted it to happen either, but feathers dropped in their own time; what could he do? In their previous life, he was just short of barging into a human residence and dumping some hair-growth formula onto himself but managed to hold back in the end. After all, the partner who would praise his beautiful plumage was no longer there.

Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue were equally as taken aback. Together, they stated that they couldn't understand what exactly Lü Lin was crying about.

"Before that annoying guy notices, I'm going to ask you both. Do you want to be together in your next lives?" Bai Shaonan said bluntly, peering at the ghostly guard busily casting hints on the babies.

Lü Lin nodded and said, "Of course I do. Too bad that we must've been blacklisted or something, right?"

Bai Shaonan didn't answer her right away but instead turned to the male eagle. "Is that also what you want? Don't make a sound, the guard will notice us."

The eagle nodded, but worried that Bai Shaonan couldn't see, he also lifted his left claw to express agreement. However, this ridiculous pose caused him to suddenly lose balance and teeter backward. Cui Yue had to bite his lip hard to keep from laughing out loud.

One lifetime apart, and her husband was not only bald but couldn't even stand properly anymore. Lü Lin gave him a look of disdain.

The eagle didn't mind at all. He maintained that a scornful look from his wife was better than no look at all.

"I thought as much." Bai Shaonan chuckled and produced two red strings from his pocket. He kept one in his hand and tossed the other to Cui Yue. "These are the strings of marriage. I purchased a promotional bundle of ten lifetimes together. If you tie it on your hand, it'll guarantee you ten lifetimes as spouses. If everything goes according to plan, you can even be ghostly guards together."

Lü Lin and the eagle exchanged an overjoyed look. They never thought that it was still possible to keep each other company in their futures.

"But don't forget, the Judge has already decreed that you can't live more than five years in each lifetime. You have a lot of suffering ahead of you in the next ten lives."

"No, as long as we have each other, we can get through hell together," Lü Lin answered determinedly.

At this point, Bai Shaonan found no point in persuading them in either direction. He turned to the ghostling beside him. "Cui Yue, tie a soulmate knot for Miss Lü here; you would've learned this already."

Cui Yue recalled the professor's expression when he practiced tying the soulmate knot in class and threw Bai Shaonan a look for help. However, Bai Shaonan's attention was focused on the incredibly difficult maneuver of tying a knot on an eagle and he didn't notice anything wrong on this end. Besides, Lü Lin had already helpfully stretched out her hand. Cui Yue had no choice but to step up to the task.

Watching Cui Yue's clumsy hands, Lü Lin knew that Bai Shaonan had done this on purpose. If he offered to tie the knot himself, his little boyfriend might have become jealous. On the other hand, if Cui Yue messed

up first, then Bai Shaonan took over after, Cui Yue would not have a reason to be upset.

Realizing how calculating Bai Shaonan was, Lü Lin doubted he helped them out of sheer goodwill and proceeded to ask, "This… must be expensive, right? Why are you being so nice to us?"

"This *was* expensive, actually. Any merchandise out of Judge Yanluo's court is always expensive and never cheap. I was only able to buy one with my credit card; the other I bought with some other ghost's card," Bai Shaonan replied.

Cui Yue focused his attention on tying the knot instead of understanding who this "other ghost" was.

Bai Shaonan continued, "Just as you thought, I wouldn't help you for nothing in return. Ten lifetimes later, you're going to be ghostly guards. Just be sure to lend a helping hand from time to time for yours truly, the most unpopular ghost among the guards." He finished tying the knot on the eagle before matter-of-factly taking over Cui Yue's task.

This was just an excuse he'd made up on the spot, but since for the next ten lifetimes, Lü Lin and her lover would only share less than five years each, it came to less than fifty years in total. For ghosts, that was but the blink of an eye. Naturally, they believed that Bai Shaonan really was making an investment for the future.

"Of course, but we won't do anything illegal." Lü Lin doubted Bai Shaonan wanted them as moles to sell him ghostly guard secrets, but she wanted to lay out the terms regardless.

"Ha. If I really was planning on that, I wouldn't have said it out loud in front of another guard," Bai Shaonan said as he glanced back. Not far from them, five ghostly guards hovered in place, staring right at them.

"They noticed that the first one didn't manage to fetch the soul back and were so worried that they sent up an entire team to see what's going

on." Contempt flashed across Bai Shaonan's face. He'd only checked some reincarnation records and bought two strings—was all this really necessary?

The five guards noticed Bai Shaonan observing them and exchanged glances with each other. Finally, one of them stepped up reluctantly and said, "Dean Bai, mind if we talk on the side for a minute?"

"I do mind." Bai Shaonan scoffed. These guards never had anything new to say; it was always disruption of equilibrium this, and interference with official business that. Why didn't they think for a second who was the one selling the strings of marriage? "Whatever you have to say, you can tell me right here."

The ghostly guard threw a glance at Cui Yue and co., and said carefully, "Bai Qinghe committed suicide in his residence."

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Bai Shaonan didn't even pause to think as he dashed at top speed to Bai Qinghe's home with Cui Yue in tow. Along the way, he realized that he was going so fast that Cui Yue couldn't keep up, even while being dragged by the wrist, so without slowing, he pulled the ghostling close and carried him on his back. The whole maneuver was so smooth it was as though he wasn't in a mad dash but simply sauntering along.

By the time they got there, Qin Feng had also arrived after hearing the news. He stood outside the door and held a hand out to stop Bai Shaonan, who was single-mindedly trying to charge into the house. "The guards are inside. They set up a high-level boundary. Not even you can get inside," he warned calmly.

Bai Shaonan sucked in a deep breath and struggled to maintain his composure. "What happened?"

"Fu Zhaoyi was the one who reported it." Qin Feng pointed behind them at the car reserved for ghostly guards as he tried to restrain Bai Shaonan from immediately heading over. Carefully enunciating each word, he said, "They're questioning him in there. You're not a ghostly guard. You. Have. No. Right. To. Listen. In."

Bai Shaonan forced himself to inhale again, deeply. Even though his relationship with Bai Qinghe had taken a turn for the worse recently, the other ghost was still his father in name, and his creator in practice. He would have a strong reaction whether he wanted to or not. For example,

every one of his fingers was tightly clenched, and some veins had popped on his forehead—signs of how much he was trying to repress his emotions.

"Is it true?" Bai Shaonan didn't throw his head back to scream, didn't smash and break things; he merely questioned Qin Feng in a quiet voice, as if the other ghost could give him a different answer.

"Shaonan, he's gone." Qin Feng switched back to his old way of addressing Bai Shaonan. He didn't know what else he could do to lessen the impact of the truth.

"Gone?" Bai Shaonan stared dumbly at Qin Feng, repeating his question quietly.

Qin Feng patiently answered, "Gone."

Bai Shaonan bowed his head, his bloodshot eyes staring dead at the ground. He didn't drench himself in tears like Lü Lin had. On the contrary, he didn't shed a single tear as he continued to emit an air of gloomy despondency, as if he was a deflated balloon ready to be blown away by the slightest yin breeze.

"Shaonan, we're here."

Cui Yue put his hand over Bai Shaonan's, attempting to loosen the tightly gripped fist. He wasn't very good at consoling ghosts, but one look at Bai Shaonan's state—like a volcano ready to erupt but trying desperately to suppress it—and he knew that he had to try no matter how bad he was at it.

He couldn't leave Bai Shaonan like this on his own.

Bai Shaonan lifted his face and looked at Cui Yue. The ghostling's eyes contained an anxiety he didn't know how to hide, but even so, he still floated up to Bai Shaonan and tried to offer comfort with his body language.

The little hotpot was here with him.

He had lost Bai Qinghe, but he still had Cui Yue and Qin Feng.

The awareness of this chased away some of the chill in Bai Shaonan's heart, but an icy pool frozen solid would not melt so easily. He gently

tapped Cui Yue's hand and told the other ghost that he wanted to be alone for a while.

"There aren't any ghosts in the garden behind the house. They didn't seal it up." Qin Feng understood how Bai Shaonan felt. Artificially created beings such as them had an indescribable attachment to their creator, whether it was him to Bai Shaonan, or Bai Shaonan to Bai Qinghe.

It was also why the board of directors at the university had always tried everything they could think of to keep Bai Shaonan and Bai Qinghe apart. They were worried that Bai Shaonan would become Bai Qinghe's private weapon.

And as for Cui Yue—Qin Feng glanced sideways at the idiot—if he could be made to love Bai Shaonan so much that it exceeded the attachment he felt for his creator, this pawn sent to them could be successfully turned.

Cui Yue noticed that Qin Feng was looking at him with an unusually convoluted expression. He wasn't sure what it meant, but he guessed that Qin Feng both wanted him to go console Bai Shaonan and at the same time was sure he would fail.

"I'll try my best to keep Bai Shaonan company." Cui Yue felt that he needed to improve his image in cult leader Qin's mind. He might have terrible academic scores but that didn't mean he was incapable of the very basics of interghost relationships.

"You better follow him around and keep an eye on him all the time. I'm worried he'll do something stupid." Qin Feng gestured a swiping motion on his own neck. Cui Yue's eyes widened in shock.

Ever since Cui Yue arrived, Bai Shaonan had entered a rebellious phase when it came to Bai Qinghe. He wasn't as fully compliant to Bai Qinghe's every command as before. Qin Feng used to think that it would end in a tangled mess, but now he was only glad that the rebellious phase had come right on time. It might just save Bai Shaonan from killing himself out of denial.

"I know." Cui Yue understood how serious this was. After the incident at the casino hotel, Cui Yue had thought Bai Shaonan and Bai Qinghe were estranged, but hearing Qin Feng's words now, it was obvious that they were incredibly close.

Qin Feng only offered an offhand reaction. To be perfectly honest, he didn't think that Cui Yue would be dependable. He was already considering the possibility of moving to Bai Shaonan's house temporarily. Though if he did, a certain clingy little gremlin would whine at him nonstop. It gave him a headache just thinking about it.

Meanwhile, Bai Shaonan entered the garden and found a corner to sit down where he wouldn't be seen from the front of the house. Even now, he couldn't believe that Bai Qinghe had killed himself just like that, without anyone knowing. Weren't there ghostly guards in charge of surveilling him? Why didn't they notice in time? Why did they only find out after Bai Qinghe's souls had disappeared into the ether, never to be salvaged again?

If he had been willing to take the time to visit, would Bai Qinghe still have committed suicide?

If he had agreed to sit down to talk with him, would Bai Qinghe still have done it?

If he had inserted himself into the "Lovingly He" investigation from the start instead of allowing the ghostly guards to flounder, would Bai Qinghe still have done this?

There were too many ifs. Bai Shaonan closed his eyes in anguish. He'd taken the wrong direction from the very start for the sake of avoiding trouble but wound up contributing to such an absurd ending.

"Apologies for interrupting, Dean Bai. We've finished a preliminary search and would like you to verify some evidence for us."

Bai Shaonan opened his eyes at the sound of his name. In contrast to his usual smug attitude, he stared with his dead eyes until the guard started

to feel creeped out. Then, he slowly opened his mouth and said, "Where is it?"

"Inside the house," the guard quickly replied. "For the record, you're going in there to verify the evidence. You can't go running around the house."

Bai Shaonan glanced at the ghostly guard, and after a long pause, finally answered, "Sure."

The guard sighed. Bai Shaonan's response sounded flimsy, so he had no idea if the ghost had meant it or not. However, he had no other choice but to lead Bai Shaonan inside and so gestured for the ghost to have a seat in a living room chair.

"First, I'm going to go through what happened. At seven minutes past eleven at night, Mr. Fu Zhaoyi came to call on Mr. Bai Qinghe unannounced about some documents that needed to be signed. However, more than ten minutes later, Mr. Bai Qinghe still hadn't answered the door. For the purpose of leaving the documents here, Mr. Fu Zhaoyi broke into the residence. At that time, Mr. Bai Qinghe was not in the house.

"Mr. Fu Zhaoyi returned at twenty-two minutes past midnight, but Mr. Bai Qinghe was still not here. He felt that something was amiss, so he lit a spirit incense, which was when he discovered that Mr. Bai Qinghe had committed suicide."

When humans die, they would at least leave behind a corpse, but when ghosts die, they left nothing behind. There had always been only one way to find out whether a ghost had died or simply gone away, and that was to light a spirit incense using an object from the ghost in question. If the smoke burned green, it meant the ghost was still in the underworld. If it burned pink, they were beyond saving.

"How did you determine it to be suicide?"

"Because of this." The guard gestured for his colleague to bring out several transparent sealed bags containing various objects. "We found quite a

few pieces of evidence in the trash can and secret cabinet in his study, all pointing to the fact that Bai Qinghe is actually 'Lovingly He.'"

Bai Shaonan looked expressionlessly at the so-called evidence. There were many little holes cut out of newspaper articles that, if pieced together with the pasted words from the threatening letter, would quickly become whole again. There were several crumpled-up pieces of paper that looked like they'd been fished from a trash can, and each was full of handwriting that hinted at earlier drafts. And then there was the phone card. As a VIP customer of the underworld telecom, Bai Qinghe would never have a use for something like that. On the other hand, Qin Feng had recently received a phone call from an unknown caller on a number that only well-acquainted ghosts would know about.

He was intimately familiar with Bai Qinghe's personality—the ghost liked to collect his creations, as well as his trash; therefore, Bai Qinghe would throw his refuse anywhere but away. Every time Bai Shaonan came over, the first thing he always did was take out the garbage.

The facts were laid out bloody and clear. Bai Qinghe was "Lovingly He."

Perhaps because he had seen it coming and the reality of Bai Qinghe's death had already numbed him, hearing the guard's explanation did not create the slightest ripple in Bai Shaonan's heart. He even had the depressing thought of "Oh, so he is."

"Look at this, Dean Bai. This is the pen and handwritten letter we found beside his bed. We searched the whole house and couldn't find a single pen. We have reason to believe that Mr. Bai Qinghe committed suicide out of guilt for his crimes," the ghostly guard said, pointing at two of the objects in the bags.

Bai Shaonan glanced at it. Unlike the previous warning letters, this one was simply a single sentence written in black ink: *Dearest Shaonan, since I*

can't have you, my heart aches beyond measure; *I would rather become a gust of yin breeze than watch the way you indulge in the sweetness.*

Seeing Bai Shaonan's low spirits, the ghostly guard worried that he would have even less energy to answer questions as time went on, so he moved on to the next topic: "Anyone who's met Mr. Bai Qinghe would know that he always carries a fountain pen on him. As Mr. Fu Zhaoyi has already confirmed, the pen found beside the bed is precisely that one. Can you also confirm this?"

"Yes." Bai Shaonan peered at the pen and nodded.

"From the looks of it, Mr. Bai Qinghe used his most precious pen to write down his last words before he committed suicide."

"Can you guys find out when exactly he killed himself?" Bai Shaonan suddenly asked. This was the first time he had willingly spoken since entering the house.

"Er…" The guard looked to his superior, who gave a slight nod. "We estimate it was three days ago."

"You deduced it from the level of ghostly energy in this place, right?" Bai Shaonan continued. The way investigations were conducted in the underworld was very predictable. After all, murder cases in the ghost realm were few and far between. Even those with unresolvable grudges typically found vengeance by dragging their enemy into reincarnation to inflict a decade or two of torture.

"Yes, we were able to detect that, until three days ago, the ghostly energy was still within the normal range. Why do you ask, Dean Bai?"

"Your colleagues told me that there are guards watching my father, but you didn't even know when he died," said Bai Shaonan. That's right. He was here to hold them accountable.

The ghostly guards in the room all looked embarrassed at this statement. In the end, it was their superior who spoke up. "We will give you an explanation after this is resolved."

Bai Shaonan chuckled. “My father’s already gone. What good is an explanation?”

Disregarding the ghostly guard’s expressions, he left them with those words and turned to leave the house. However, he got to the doorway just in time to see a furious Fu Zhaoyi about to land a slap on Qin Feng’s face.

“What are you doing!” Bai Shaonan bellowed in anger as he charged up and stopped Fu Zhaoyi.

Qin Feng was clearly not one to stand there and take a hit. In contrast to Fu Zhaoyi’s rage, he only turned his body slightly to let the slap land in the air. From start to finish, he only showed elegant detachment, never quite seeing the Fu ghost as a threat.

“Director Fu, we’re still standing on Bai Qinghe’s property. It doesn’t reflect well on you to attempt to hit me as soon as you got out of the car.” Qin Feng’s attitude of manufactured concern was practically tossing fuel onto fire.

Fu Zhaoyi was about to go on a tirade when Bai Shaonan stopped him and said coolly, “Fu Zhaoyi, what did my secretary do to offend you?”

“Offend?” Fu Zhaoyi’s rage turned into a chortle. “The dean’s secretary is sleeping with a student. If word gets out, what will other ghosts think of our school!”

Cui Yue, who had been hiding in the corner listening, opened his eyes wide in shock. Did that mean that Cao Zhongnan had successfully taken Qin Feng? When did this happen? Why was he completely unaware?

Bai Shaonan, yet another school administrator plotting to get a student into his bed, no doubt was going to defend Qin Feng. He immediately rebuked, “The members of the board are directors in name only. You only ever cared about who was going to die, so since when are you so concerned about the school’s reputation?”

At this, Bai Shaonan gave Fu Zhaoyi a meaningful look. “Or perhaps you’re actually upset about my secretary losing his virginity and think that

his first time should've been with you?"

A hush descended on the whole scene as soon as the words were out of Bai Shaonan's mouth. Even the guards with their ears pricked up inside the house were holding their breaths instinctively. Only a few seconds later did they remember they actually didn't need to breathe.

Cui Yue clamped his hand over his mouth to keep from gasping out loud. He couldn't believe that, even under these circumstances, he'd still receive the freshest news about his cult leader.

Though at first his rage boiled over and shot past its critical point, Fu Zhaoyi calmed again. He was quiet for a few seconds, entirely unlike his furious conduct from earlier, then said, "Dean Bai, please take that back."

"Take what back?" Bai Shaonan arched his brow. "Is Qin Feng breaking his abstinence such a blow to you? I never would've expected you to have a virgin complex."

Qin Feng finally couldn't help chiming in at this point. "I'm sorry, can I ask what gave you the wrongful impression that I'm still a virgin?"

Bai Shaonan threw Qin Feng a glance. "Didn't I say that you're not anymore? It's too bad, if you lasted a full three hundred years, you could've been a magician."

Fu Zhaoyi realized that he needed to take back the reins before Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng could very possibly continue on this topic for another three days and three nights. "Dean Bai, I ask that you take back what you said about me having an interest in Qin Feng."

"Does that mean you admit to having a virgin complex?" Bai Shaonan smirked.

"There is nothing true about your earlier statements, Dean Bai. It is an insult to me." Fu Zhaoyi cursed himself into silence from falling into Bai Shaonan's trap. His life had recently been made very difficult because of Bai Shaonan. The other members of the board had gone from not daring to speak their minds to challenging his every move. If Bai Shaonan's slander

were to spread, he would be surprised if the other Fu ghosts on the board *didn't* use it to their advantage.

"What? Is it insulting to like me?" Qin Feng knew what Fu Zhaoyi was thinking, but since he'd already been labeled by Bai Shaonan as freshly deflowered, he wouldn't let Fu Zhaoyi off the hook that easily.

Slandering the Fu family was not only one of Bai Shaonan's interests, it was also one of Qin Feng's hobbies.

"I NEVER LIKED YOU!" Fu Zhaoyi knew from those words that Qin Feng was planning to stir up trouble. If Bai Shaonan wasn't watching hawkishly on the side like he was ready to throw fists at any time, he would have given Qin Feng a solid punch. But now, all he could do was stand there, his face and neck both red as he glared at the other ghost.

This textbook demonstration of "tsundere" only reinforced the theory of Fu Zhaoyi's crush. Every ghost present sucked in a breath in shock. The guards looked at one another blankly. It was a gossip universally acknowledged that the Bai and Fu families didn't get along, but they had no idea the intrigue contained a *Romeo and Juliet* element. It was all up to Qin Feng now to accept or not.

Bai Shaonan exchanged a look with Cui Yue, who thought he was hiding very well in the distance. Bai Shaonan's eyes were helpless with wild disbelief. He was only trying to get the upper hand in a verbal fight, but after Fu Zhaoyi's outburst, he had to consider the possibility that Fu Zhaoyi really was harboring some secret affection.

Fu Zhaoyi knew nothing of trends in popular culture, but he did notice the fearful trepidation on Bai Shaonan's face. The director didn't know how one sentence from him could have had this effect, even as Qin Feng also shot him a contemptuous look. Combining the reactions of the two ghosts, Fu Zhaoyi knew that this wouldn't end the way he wanted.

His only option now was to seek legal counsel and send Bai Shaonan a warning.

"You all can expect to receive a letter from my lawyer." Fu Zhaoyi swept his eyes over Bai Shaonan, Qin Feng, and Cui Yue, then emphasized, "Every single one of you."

Bai Shaonan's heart quivered at the mention of a lawyer. If Fu Zhaoyi was willing to go that far, it was likely that he really was into Qin Feng. With Director Fu's personality and position, he must have known it would be a doomed romance, so he dared not confess the true feelings he cradled secretly in his bosom… until one day he received word that Qin Feng and Cao Zhongnan were together. All that love and admiration must've turned into aggression, and he couldn't stop himself from lashing out at Qin Feng for hooking up with a student.

It was surprising indeed to find out that Fu Zhaoyi was a tsundere. It was also really… icky.

"Don't worry, we won't tell anyone about this. And as for Qin Feng's private matters, I'll talk to him and find out more." Bai Shaonan decided to lend Fu Zhaoyi a helping hand, given how much the director was "suffering." Though he wouldn't spread that *Fu Zhaoyi* had a crush on Qin Feng, of course, he might instead tell everyone that an unnamed high-level underworld executive had a crush on his secretary.

"Hmph. You better." Fu Zhaoyi floated away in a huff. He didn't know why Bai Shaonan was suddenly willing to concede, but it at least saved him the trip to his lawyer.

After Fu Zhaoyi left, Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng both breathed a sigh of relief. As the object of affection, Qin Feng narrowed his eyes. He had never noticed any ghosts tailing him. How had Fu Zhaoyi found out that he and Cao Zhongnan were rolling around in the sheets?

"What are you doing hovering so far away? C'mere." First it was Bai Qinghe's suicide, and now Fu Zhaoyi had a crush on Qin Feng. Bai Shaonan's heart felt weary beyond belief. He gestured for Cui Yue to float closer to him, and prepared to go home.

"Earlier, Fu Zhaoyi told him to fuck off, and fuck off he did. How obedient," Qin Feng noted. A ghost of the Bai family showing submission to a Fu ghost was simply an embarrassment.

"I-I saw that he was very upset," Cui Yue argued quietly. He knew that Qin Feng would be able to protect him, but when the danger was headed straight for Qin Feng, Cui Yue naturally bounced away for the sake of his own safety. After all, Qin Feng could handle it, but he might not be able to.

"Never mind." Bai Shaonan turned and yelled into the house, "Hey! Oh esteemed officer guard, you got any more questions for me?"

A ghostly guard stuck his head out of the house. "Nothing for now. We'll contact you if anything comes up."

Back at home, Bai Shaonan rummaged through the kitchen and dug up two cups of instant stick-incense noodles. After he and Cui Yue each ate one, he took to a corner, sat down, and started contemplating. Cui Yue knew that Bai Shaonan needed some time to let the events sink in, so he gave the dean space and went upstairs to shower. However, when he came back down an hour and a half later, Bai Shaonan was still sitting in the same spot in the exact same pose as when he left, having not moved an inch.

Cui Yue hovered in place, trying to remember the consolation guide he'd searched up on his phone just now and whether any lines seemed appropriate to use on Bai Shaonan.

I know you're very sad, but you can't neglect your health like this. Nope. Bai Shaonan was a jade spirit. Mentions of health wouldn't work on him.

We'll always be here. He'd said this already, which resulted in Bai Shaonan going off to sit by himself.

My condolences. Try not to feel too upset. No shit. If your dad suddenly killed himself, wouldn't you be upset?

We cannot take back the past. We can only look forward. Let whatever has passed stay in the past. You still have other people to keep you company. Would that sound a little too cold?

Cui Yue was still agonizing over what to say when Bai Shaonan shifted his gaze and was surprised to see Cui Yue on the stairs, staring off into space. "Little hotpot, come here."

Cui Yue shrank back a little. He was being summoned but he hadn't even thought of anything. He couldn't *not* go over either. The bitterness evident on his face, he floated up to Bai Shaonan's side, and recited the only line he thought could be useful in this situation: "What's happened cannot be changed. We can only learn to be strong and live on. Flowers bloom and wilt, all things on Earth have a start and finish. Bai Qinghe merely chose the path of becoming one with nature. Try not to be too upset. Besides, you still have us by your side…"

Bai Shaonan's eye twitched. He tugged on Cui Yue's hair, grumpily cutting off the recital. "I'm not so miserable that I need you to recite this useless chicken soup crap at me. Don't worry, I'm fine."

"But Qin Feng told me that you'll kill yourself," Cui Yue said anxiously, the word "maybe" got stuck in his throat. Bai Shaonan's expression darkened as he cursed Qin Feng in his mind for talking nonsense to Cui Yue.

He, Bai Shaonan, would never commit suicide because he couldn't take the reality of Bai Qinghe's passing. Qin Feng was too much of a worrywart.

"Tell him to eat shit. Don't listen to everything he says." Since Qin Feng wasn't here, Bai Shaonan was free to curse out loud before continuing, "Little hotpot, my father is 'Lovingly He.'"

"What?" Shock colored Cui Yue's face. He hadn't even decided whether to jump on the Qin Feng hate train for the sake of comforting Bai Shaonan, when the subject abruptly changed. He couldn't keep up with such a dramatic turn.

But this was better. This way, he didn't need to slander the very person who had assigned him his task of consoling Bai Shaonan.

Hey, wait a second. What did Bai Shaonan just say?

Bai Shaonan saw that Cui Yue's jaw was hanging open in disbelief. "I said, my father is the ghost who wanted to kill you. I'm sorry, little hotpot, it's my fault," Bai Shaonan apologized in a low voice, biting his lip.

"No." Cui Yue blinked several times before he could start to process this fact. "Are you sure Fu Zhaoyi didn't set him up before reporting it?"

He didn't remember crossing Bai Qinghe, so why would the ghost want to kill him?

"No. I'm very sure that it's him." Bai Shaonan smiled bitterly. He knew now why those threatening letters always seemed to be from a fanatical admirer. After all, Bai Qinghe couldn't accept that the perfect specimen he created had picked a silly little ghost as his other half.

Bai Qinghe really was to be pitied. Even in his post-afterlife death, his unusual feelings remained unnoticed by Bai Shaonan, who naively believed this was simply the tragic family drama of an in-law unsatisfied with his son's choice of bride.

"Did he kill himself out of guilt?" Bai Shaonan was just thinking about Cui Yue's lack of intelligence when Cui Yue asked him an extremely tactless question.

"I don't know." Bai Shaonan stroked Cui Yue's round head. "I may be very busy for the next little while. You should be careful, try not to go too far."

"But didn't you say…"

"Little hotpot, you're a target, but so were the ghosts of the Fu family. If you're still alive after they lost multiple directors, do you think they'd let you off so easily?"

Cui Yue shuddered. Yes, how could he forget that there was still a Bai-Fu war waiting to happen. But hold on, was he now promoted from a lackey to the lady of the house—bah. No, not lady, but master…? Or… the master's boyfriend?

Didn't that put him in a kidnappable role?!

"Won't I have bodyguards?" Cui Yue asked weakly. Even if Bai Shaonan had faith in him, he had no faith in himself.

"You will, but they'll still need to be arranged. For the next few days, try to stick with Cao B. If anything happens, just band together and cry for help." Bai Shaonan glanced at Cui Yue. With Bai Qinghe's death, there would be many ghosts coming out of the fray to try to take over his research. He didn't know if or when any one of them might shift their sights to Cui Yue, so bodyguards were a must.

"How long will it take to arrange?"

"Not sure. I have to go to Judge Yanluo's court in three hours. That's when the Judge takes his evening snack. He'll have more time to listen."

"You're going to let the ghostly guards continue as my bodyguards?"

"Of course. You think the Fus will be deterred by any old ghost? They'll understand the Judge is watching them if the ghostly guards are here, so they won't try anything funny."

"Is Qin Feng not available?"

"… Never mind. Just stay on campus for the next little while. Qin Feng is on campus most of the time, and I can sleep in the dean's office in the morning instead of coming back here. That way you'll be able to reach me or Qin Feng at any time."

"If that's the case, then is it okay if I-I also sleep in your office?" Cui Yue immediately asked. If Bai Shaonan couldn't return to sleep in his own home because of him, he very well couldn't sleep in the comfort of his own dormitory bed while the other ghost was relegated to an office chair.

Bai Shaonan arched his brows and glanced at Cui Yue, no doubt thinking what a great idea this was. However, he didn't want to make the ghostling cram himself into an office chair with him, so he pulled out his phone and ordered Qin Feng to swap the sofa in the reception room with one that could sleep two ghosts.

Cui Yue blushed when he heard. It was a clear message to him that they'd have to sleep together, even if it was on the sofa. However, he suddenly remembered that he was supposed to be consoling Bai Shaonan, so how had things progressed to the point where they had to get someone to burn down a sofa for the school's private use?

He snuck a glance at Bai Shaonan while the ghost was still on the phone with Qin Feng. His composure hardly resembled the distraught ghost while at Bai Qinghe's home. *Have I done it, after all*? Cui Yue questioned himself—had he successfully diverted Bai Shaonan's attention just as his cult leader had asked him to?

Probably... yes?

The next day, when Cui Yue returned to school, news of Bai Qinghe's suicide had spread and become the topic of the day.

"I thought they were supposed to keep it on the down-low for a while?" Cui Yue quietly asked Qin Feng, who was currently temping as his bodyguard.

"That pervert with a crush on me published an online post that said: 'In eternal remembrance of Bai Qinghe.' Now the whole world knows." Qin Feng laughed contemptuously.

Not ten minutes after Fu Zhaoyi's post, Qin Feng had also posted online: "First you confess your love for me at the home of the deceased, and now you're trying to memorialize the dead? Is it regret over never having the chance to call him master?" Of course, Qin Feng had deftly deleted the post before it incited an uproar throughout hell, but the followers of his cult and the slash fans of the Qin/Bai ship were quick to screenshot. Soon, enthusiastic discussions in the fandoms erupted over the shocking Fu/Bai and Qin/Fu/Bai combinations.

And where had Bai Shaonan's promise for discretion gone? Qin Feng maintained that it was his boss's word to keep, and not his own.

"Did he do it on purpose?"

"Of course it was on purpose. Many ghosts who don't know the truth think that your boyfriend reached his current position only because of Bai Qinghe. Now that Bai Qinghe is gone, they'll naturally come after Bai Shaonan's interests," Qin Feng said as he gave Cui Yue a pointed look.

"Am I Bai Shaonan's interest? Are they going to come for me?" Cui Yue was horrified.

Qin Feng was quiet for a second. It was true that Bai Shaonan's greatest interest was the artificially made being similar to himself, which was Cui Yue, and even himself, but coming from Cui Yue's mouth, the words still displeased him.

"You're overthinking it. I'm only telling you to be careful." Qin Feng saw Cao Zhongnan in the distance making his way over. "It's almost time for class. You go with Cao B, and if there's any problem, just come find me in the dean's office."

Cui Yue nodded and watched Qin Feng's receding figure. Why did he get the sense that Qin Feng the Great was… fleeing?

It must have been a trick of the light. Cui Yue immediately rejected the notion. Qin Feng the Great had the wind at his feet while he walked. "Fleeing" was a word that could never apply to him.

Cao Zhongnan also watched Qin Feng in the distance as the secretary floated away. The student's face betrayed no obvious emotion except a tiny spark of glee in his eyes. When Qin Feng's figure had disappeared entirely from his view, he finally greeted Cui Yue and made some small talk before heading off to class.

"Please pay attention, everyone. The lecture today is going to be about 'cursed homes' and, of course, we couldn't cover those without also going over the inseparable violent incidents that occurred within them. To

understand these violent cases and reflect on them is what we will concentrate on in this class."

By the time Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue arrived, filing into the back with their purchased meals, the lecture had already started. The professor cast a contemptuous look at the two tardy students, who hunched over as if that would make them more discreet, then decided to ignore them and continue the lecture.

At the end of the lecture, Cui Yue tossed the takeout container away despondently. Having refined his taste buds under Bai Shaonan's care, he now found the cafeteria food unbearable, where once he thought it was actually pretty tasty.

"What are you daydreaming about, a-Yue? Go pick your house!"

Cao Zhongnan's voice brought Cui Yue back from the fond memory of his vermicelli incense and abalone sauce dinner. He looked at Cao Zhongnan with confusion. "What house?"

"Were you not listening to what Professor Chen was saying? You have to pick a unit from his list to practice your haunting. It's due in three weeks." Cao Zhongnan pointed at the line in the front of the room. "I thought you were right behind me. I only realized you weren't there when I finished choosing and turned around. Hurry up and get in line or all the good units are gonna be gone. Remember to pick a house with a history of murder or suicide; natural deaths are harder."

Cui Yue floated to the end of the line in a daze. He was too embarrassed to admit to Cao Zhongnan that he'd spent the whole class distracted by the substandard quality of the cafeteria food. His notebook was completely blank, having taken down nothing from the lecture.

When his turn came, every unit with a history of violence had already been taken, leaving only the ones with the highest difficulty that no ghost wanted. Cui Yue scanned through the residences' summaries over and over again, trying to pick one of the easier ones.

The professor watched Cui Yue deliberate over the choices, gleaning that this was a slacker who'd ended up with his pick of only the most difficult assignments. Even a zero would be considered a high score, so to help the lad out, the professor reached out a hand and pointed the way.

"Pick this one. It's a newly built condo unit with a relatively clean slate. It'll be easier for you to express yourself," the professor said quietly. Cui Yue was the only student still in the classroom, so no other ghost was there to notice the professor giving him a tip.

"Thank you, Professor Chen. Then I'll choose this one!" Cui Yue said immediately.

"Shh, keep it on the down-low." The professor gave Cui Yue a cryptic smile, letting him know that it would be a secret between the two of them.

Waiting by the door, Cao Zhongnan still hadn't seen Cui Yue come out. He poked his head in just in time to see this interaction. He merely arched a brow at the innocuous scene but at the same time felt that something was off.

Cui Yue thanked the professor three times over before leaving the classroom. It was the only class he had today, and normally he would have returned to Bai Shaonan's house by now. However, since he was staying on campus for a few days, he decided to head to the library to do some research. Cao Zhongnan had also planned to go to the library, but he had signed up for an interuniversity event earlier and had an interview to attend.

So, Cui Yue went by himself to the library and, after finishing some research, received a notice from Qin Feng telling him to come to the dean's office. He assumed it was important, and so didn't ask much before he collected his things and headed over. This all culminated in his surprise when he saw two familiar faces upon floating into the room.

Lü Lin was sitting on the sofa, leisurely sipping a cup of tea, while her eagle husband perched on her arm and stared at the recently arrived Cui Yue with sharp and lively eyes.

"What are you doing here?" He and Bai Shaonan had left the couple behind without a word the other day; could they be here to file a complaint? He pondered to himself as he snuck a glance at the door to see where Qin Feng was. He could call on the great cult leader if anything was beyond his ability to handle.

"You guys left yesterday before we had a chance to thank you properly." There was happiness in Lü Lin's smile. Apparently, human or ghost, she was content as long as she could be with her other half.

"No need to thank us. Bai Shaonan also said that he wasn't doing it for free," Cui Yue answered. Clearly, he believed in Bai Shaonan's bullshit about using them to form a friendly relationship with the guards.

"I only heard about what happened with Dean Bai once I got here. We were originally planning to thank him in person, but since he's busy, we'd like to ask you to pass on our gratitude and condolences." Lü Lin set the teacup down and reached out to grasp Cui Yue's hand. "It's a painful experience, losing a loved one. Mr. Cui, please be sure to keep Dean Bai company."

The eagle also let out a timely cry. It might have lost a wife, and Bai Shaonan a father, but both had suffered the passing of someone dear to them. As an eagle who'd been through something similar, it understood very well the anguish that involved.

Cui Yue was touched. They'd only known Lü Lin for a few days, but she was the first ghost to express her condolences to Bai Shaonan since Bai Qinghe's death. Even Cao Zhongnan had failed to bring it up, as though nothing had happened yesterday. He gazed intently at Lü Lin and promised, "I'll keep an eye on his emotional wellbeing. Thank you for the thought."

Lü Lin nodded. It was about time for the couple to go into reincarnation. The sooner they finished the cycles of life, the sooner they'd start working as guards, and the sooner they could pay Bai Shaonan back. That was both their wishes.

“Sorry, I can’t leave campus, so I won’t be able to accompany you for this last leg of the journey,” Cui Yue said as they were about to leave.

“No need to walk us. Dean Bai’s affairs are more important. Rather than walk us, you should keep him company,” was Lü Lin’s effortless reply.

Only after they left did Qin Feng come out from whatever corner he was hiding in. “Those were the two ghosts you guys went to the human hospital to see the other day?”

“Yeah, is something the matter?” Cui Yue nodded.

“Nothing, just asking. I was wondering where the hell Bai Shaonan went to meet a Mongolian ghost,” Qin Feng replied

Cui Yue blinked. No wonder he felt a sense of fondness when he came in, so this was the reason.

“All right, end of conversation.” Qin Feng pointed at the sofa Lü Lin was just sitting on. “I didn’t ask you here just for them. Bai Shaonan said this morning he wanted to swap out this sofa. Come help.”

Cui Yue nodded. Normally, no subordinate in the world would tell his boss’s boyfriend to complete the task given to him by said boss. Not only did this not occur to Cui Yue, but he was thrilled to assist Qin Feng the Great in any way.

The mysterious Bai Shaonan didn’t appear until noon the next day when he wandered slowly into the office. Cui Yue was originally planning to stay awake and wait for him, but “waiting” slowly turned into a deep slumber. In his sleepy daze, his primal instinct for finding a nest activated, and with his eyes still closed, he managed to get himself to the new sofa, where he found a comfortable position and continued to snooze.

Qin Feng only lifted his eyes to briefly glance at Bai Shaonan drifting in before putting his head back down to keep working. Since he had to stand guard until Bai Shaonan came back, he figured he might as well use the time to get things done. Though by the looks of it, Qin Feng had

forgotten all about his role as a bodyguard and had fully immersed himself in the work.

"Go ahead."

Qin Feng saw Bai Shaonan stop in front of his desk and knew the other ghost wanted to have a conversation. He paused and closed the door to the reception room. After making sure that Cui Yue wouldn't be disturbed in his slumber, he finally spoke in the tone of a CEO waiting for a subordinate's report.

The actual boss didn't mind Qin Feng's insubordination. "I had it out with the Judge."

Qin Feng wasn't surprised at this. In the eyes of the real powers in the underworld, Bai Shaonan was nothing but a tool for garbage disposal. His title as a dean and his surface feud with the Fu family were only a shallow facade. Without Bai Qinghe's technical expertise and the Judge's practical support behind him, it would be difficult to keep Cui Yue safe.

"You told him everything?"

"Everything. But obviously, I told only him," Bai Shaonan said. In order to have that conversation, he'd forced his way into the Judge's evening snack time, and even brought his own utensils. He ate three slices of cheesecake in front of the host before ordering another two slices.

"How did he react? Was he angry?"

"Of course." Bai Shaonan nodded. The dessert he'd tried so hard to hide from the guards had been pilfered by another ghost. *Of course* the Judge was angry. Naturally, when Bai Shaonan came clean about Cui Yue, the Judge had become even more upset and almost threw the matcha ice cream onto the ground.

"So what kind of arrangement did you make with him?" Qin Feng noticed that Bai Shaonan's expression was weary but not negative in any way. He knew that they must have come to an agreement of some kind.

"I told him that Bai Qinghe. Was. Murdered," Bai Shaonan slowly enunciated each word. The murder was also why he had been released from his grief so quickly.

He found it impossible not to feel resentment toward Bai Qinghe. Nevertheless, Bai Qinghe's attempts to kill the little hotpot were an internal affair within the Bai family. How best to deal with the scheme and whether to notify the guards or personally tear him apart had been Bai Shaonan's private business. He could have refused to forgive Bai Qinghe for all of eternity, but it didn't mean that he could accept the death of his creator at the hands of any random passerby.

"You're saying he's not 'Lovingly He'?" Qin Feng asked. To be honest, when he heard about the evidence, he'd also thought, *That's right, Bai Qinghe is exactly that kind of ghost.*

"No, he is. But the 'last words' weren't his. The guard said he wrote it using the pen he carried around—yes, the same one I gave him." Bai Shaonan smirked. "But don't tell me you've forgotten that the only pen I ever gifted him had a faulty ink cartridge, so the writing has always come out as gray, not black."

"That shitty pen?" Qin Feng's eye twitched. That year, on Bai Qinghe's annual death day, Bai Shaonan, childish as he was, had somehow found a broken fountain pen from who knows where and presented it as what he thought would be a very cool gift. Of course, blindly in love with Bai Shaonan as he was, Bai Qinghe happily accepted it without objection.

Back then, nobody knew that it would become crucial evidence in Bai Qinghe's murder. How ironic.

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Frankly, when Qin Feng first heard about the content of the "last words," he thought the words did not have the same translationese-like tone of the other letters, which inspired doubt over Bai Qinghe's authorship of the note. However, he avoided voicing his concern in case it would bring Bai Shaonan false hope.

"I told the Judge the murderer is Fu Zhaoyi, but that old fox is very careful, so I said I would take responsibility to look for the evidence to bring him down. In exchange, if I'm successful, the Judge has to acknowledge Cui Yue as a legitimate being, just like me. And when necessary, he will come with me on missions." This was the best arrangement Bai Shaonan had come up with, after much contemplation. The underworld wouldn't tolerate the existence of bizarre products of science, if they were useless. So, he used the frequent injuries he'd sustained in recent missions as a reason to ask the Judge to enlist Cui Yue as his partner.

It was difficult for Cui Yue to contribute much to a mission with his limited abilities, but Bai Shaonan could simply bring the ghost with him to the human realm and set him to the side. Strictly speaking, a partner didn't have to engage in battle. Sometimes a partnership could be between a fighter and his mascot.

"How are you sure that it's him?" Qin Feng asked, though he knew Fu Zhaoyi was the most likely suspect.

"Who else could it be? He was the one who hinted to me that Father was 'Lovingly He.' He must be watching us closely to know how displeased Father was about a future in-law."

Bai Shaonan intentionally didn't bring up the question of the pen to the guards earlier, precisely so he could use it as a bargaining chip with the Judge. Ever since the directors on the board had started being picked off one by one, Fu Zhaoyi's power had been growing by the day. When it came down to it, Bai Shaonan was working for the greater good, and it was necessary for the board to have a serious discussion about whether each target needed to be eliminated instead of coming up with a name and getting the other ghosts to sign off.

Speaking of targets—Bai Shaonan had taken a look at Li Xizhi's research, and the result was thought provoking, to say the least. There were studies on demonic possession, techniques for measuring ghost energy, methods for how deceased spirits could bypass boundaries; that is to say, every topic was closely connected to the way "Lovingly He" carried out his crimes.

One of the reasons Fu Zhaoyi called him that day was to show off his newfound power, but it also revealed the fact that he was the one who put Li Xizhi's name up for elimination. The bullshit about equilibrium aside, to have found Li Xizhi among the entire realm of mortals must mean that he had wanted this person dead for personal reasons.

Putting together these individual occurrences, even Bai Shaonan thought something smelled fishy, never mind the Judge. However, they couldn't let the other ghostly guards know about Li Xizhi, so Bai Shaonan was the only one who could investigate Fu Zhaoyi.

As a result, the Judge promised Bai Shaonan to exchange Fu Zhaoyi for Cui Yue. And, of course, Bai Shaonan also needed to get to the bottom of Cui Yue's origin as well.

Throughout this, both Bai Shaonan and the Judge had tacitly avoided bringing up Qin Feng's candidateship as Bai Shaonan's partner. The champion at the top of the Ghoul Chart was the best no matter where he went and was obviously not suited to this dirty work.

"What we're going to do is the same as the guards, but not quite the same either. Their job is to find out how my father murdered those ghosts. Meanwhile, we have to pin the blame for all of the murders on Fu Zhaoyi," Bai Shaonan concluded.

"Didn't you say that Bai Qinghe is 'Lovingly He'? Even you admitted that. Why are you pinning everything on Fu Zhaoyi?" Qin Feng reminded him grumpily.

"What if I told you that 'Lovingly He' is actually made up of two ghosts?" A glint flashed across Bai Shaonan's eyes. "Father wasn't happy about little hotpot, and Fu Zhaoyi wanted to seize power. Two ghosts with seemingly no connection to each other joined forces behind everyone's backs, then after getting his way, Fu Zhaoyi took my father out of the picture and blamed everything on him."

"That's not impossible. It's true that Bai Qinghe had no motive for killing the directors on the board. Meanwhile, it's obvious just looking at Fu Zhaoyi now that he must be one of the culprits." Qin Feng considered it for a moment. What Bai Shaonan said made sense. If it wasn't for the lack of evidence, he would have already believed it to be the truth.

"Right, and he could even use this to get closer to you—two birds with one stone," Bai Shaonan added. It was rare that he would change his mind about something he'd already assumed to be true. Just as he was sure that Cui Yue had a crush on him, he was also sure of Fu Zhaoyi's unrequited love for Qin Feng.

"Get to the point if you want to sleep."

"Based on what I know, the ghostly guards only found two letters tucked away in Father's house: the two that targeted little hotpot. As for the

ones to the Fu ghosts, I don't know if they didn't find them, or if they were just never there. If you ask me, I'm leaning toward the second possibility." Bai Shaonan scoffed. They wanted to push all the blame onto Bai Qinghe just because they couldn't find anything else. Well, to do that, they'd have to go through his son first.

Since Fu Zhaoyi had personally handed him leverage, he wasn't about to let it go to waste.

Qin Feng shot Bai Shaonan a look. "Is that also what you said to the Judge?"

"Of course, why else would he have agreed about Cui Yue?" Bai Shaonan rolled his eyes and continued, "Right now, we have to split our efforts: one ghost will be responsible for Cui Yue, and the other for Fu Zhaoyi. What do you think?"

"I don't want to be responsible for either." Qin Feng once again demonstrated his wicked nature, successfully evoking not only anger but also fright from his boss.

"Are you going to stand by and watch Cao Zhongnan's good buddy become a widow?" Bai Shaonan finally got to use Cao Zhongnan as a threat.

"That sounds good. Cui Yue can find himself a new wife, since his current one refuses to settle down and dreams all day of getting a sex change to become his husband," Qin Feng shot back.

Bai Shaonan was speechless and could only manage to think in his mind, *Qin Feng, you asshole.*

"Fine, since you're so pathetic. I'll look into Cui Yue for you," Qin Feng said, mercifully.

"Thank you, Qin Feng the Great, for your kind charity," Bai Shaonan replied in a deadpan voice.

"All right, I'm leaving then." Qin Feng glanced at his phone. It was two thirty-seven in the afternoon. Instead of going home, perhaps he could go squeeze into the dorm room of a certain ghost?

"Oh, yeah, there'll be new bodyguards from the ghostly guards here next Tuesday. That way you won't have to wait for me to come back, and I won't have to squeeze onto the sofa with the little hotpot," Bai Shaonan said without a second glance as he floated to the reception room next door. Without Qin Feng beside him, he could finally stop repressing himself and let those bottled-up emotions come to the surface.

His feelings at the moment were so complicated that he didn't know what to do with them. On one hand, his heart ached for the loss of his creator, but on the other, he thought Bai Qinghe deserved it for expressing his opinion of Cui Yue in such an extreme fashion. On another hand, he wanted to let Fu Zhaoyi know that a Bai ghost was not to be trifled with, and on yet another other hand, he thought it was impossible for Bai Qinghe to refuse to accept a mate that he'd picked out himself.

He wasn't sure if he should feel grief, confusion, relief, or anger. What was worse, these four emotions lingered in a conflicting swirl in his heart and almost led him to blurt out in front of the Judge: *I don't care about any of it.*

But if he really did lock himself away in a corner, then he wouldn't be able to save Cui Yue.

The only thing that kept his heart warm and made him want to continue on despite this hopeless predicament was the silly little hotpot.

At the thought of Cui Yue, the corners of Bai Shaonan's mouth turned up slightly. But when he remembered that he would have to eke out space on the narrow sofa around Cui Yue's bold and unrestrained sleeping positions, he felt bottled up again.

However, when Bai Shaonan floated to the sofa, he was surprised to find that Cui Yue wasn't lying there with his limbs splayed out, but rather was folded in a little pile with his face flushed, mumbling something unintelligible.

Bai Shaonan arched his brows, and without thinking, leaned down to eavesdrop on Cui Yue's sleep talk. Just as he thought, he heard fragments of moans, including words that sounded like "no," "don't," and "stop it."

Did the little hotpot feel so unsatiated that he was… having a wet dream?

The tangled mess of emotions from earlier were punted to outer space by a sudden eruption of displeasure. Bai Shaonan glared at Cui Yue. With such a handsome dean as his boyfriend, couldn't he just express his needs verbally? It was truly a pitiful outlook for morals and his ghosthood for him to have to resort to this.

Displeased as he was, Bai Shaonan's hands still moved of their own accord and reached for Cui Yue's pajamas. As the considerate other half, he was naturally going to satisfy his partner properly and put the content of the dream into practice. As he got to the third button, Cui Yue squirmed suddenly as his eyes slowly opened, revealing the haziness contained within.

"You're awake?" Bai Shaonan asked softly. Even better. Two ghosts working together was always better than a one-sided exercise.

Cui Yue blinked, and blinked, then blinked again. He suddenly widened his eyes. Only then did he belatedly realize what Bai Shaonan was doing. How could Bai Shaonan undress him while he was asleep! He'd catch a cold with his belly exposed!

"Don't take my clothes off!" All remnants of sleep disappeared from Cui Yue's mind. He hurriedly grabbed Bai Shaonan's errant hands. In such emergencies as this, he didn't have time to pass his words through his brain as he blurted out, "This is underwear that Qin Feng the Great personally sewed for me; you can't take them off!"

Bai Shaonan paused what he was doing and narrowed his eyes dangerously as he stared at Cui Yue. "What did you say, little hotpot?"

"That—not like that." Bai Shaonan's gaze was positively murderous, so Cui Yue shrank in on himself and said in a quiet voice, "I dreamed that Qin

Feng made me a pair of underwear as thanks for helping him move the sofa… And then… and then you tried to strip off the underwear I'd just put on…"

Bai Shaonan's eye twitched violently. So the little hotpot's moans and protests and "no don't stop" were not part of a wet dream but attempts at trying to safeguard his underwear?

What in the hell?

Bai Shaonan sighed. "Little hotpot, you shouldn't casually accept undergarments as gifts. Besides, when other ghosts gift you something, you should think carefully about it before deciding whether you should accept." He held an internal struggle between continuing to strip the little hotpot or educating him, and finally gave up.

"I know that. In the dream, I went along with Qin Feng to pick out the fabric, then watched as he sewed it by hand. Otherwise I wouldn't have accepted it," said Cui Yue. As the boyfriend of the master of the Bai household, of course he knew what he should accept and what to decline.

Bai Shaonan's eye twitched violently as jealousy erupted within him. He knew it was only a dream, but it was still a projection of Cui Yue's subconscious. He accepted Qin Feng's gift without question, and even immediately put them on. But what about a gift from him? Would Cui Yue have accepted one so readily? Hold on, had he ever given Cui Yue anything?

No. Other than takeout food and the gift of enrollment, it appeared that he had never gifted Cui Yue anything proper.

Bai Shaonan suddenly felt a little sheepish. Could it be that, in Cui Yue's subconscious, he was unhappy that Bai Shaonan had never bought him a gift?

"Don't worry," Bai Shaonan said, immediately making a promise after deciding to make it up to his boyfriend. "I'll gift you a whole box of new underwear later. For now, stop wearing these."

It was important that Cui Yue take off the underwear he wore following a Qin Feng dream or the ghostling surely wouldn't sleep soundly, if he even slept a wink.

"No, I don't want underwear—and don't take my pants off! Get your hand away!" Cui Yue grabbed his waistband tight as he warded off Bai Shaonan. Since returning from the human realm, he had asked Cao Zhongnan to find him an innocent pedestrian to burn him a whole box of solid-colored underwear to avoid triggering the jade spirit Bai Shaonan's peculiar kink.

The pedestrian must have been properly terrified by Cao Zhongnan, since not only had he sent them solid colors but neon ones too. Cui Yue had washed all the normal colors recently, so today he was wearing neon green underwear.

As soon as Cao Zhongnan saw the underwear, he blurted out that anyone wearing this color was asking to be fucked. Therefore, in defense of his chastity, Cui Yue absolutely refused to let Bai Shaonan take his pajama pants off.

Bai Shaonan didn't know all the little workings of Cui Yue's mind. After wasting the remainder of his limited energy, he had to give up on the idea of stripping the ghostling of his underwear and even redid the buttons on the pajama top.

"All right, I'm beat." Bai Shaonan yawned and pointed at the sofa. "Scooch over and give me some room to doze for a bit."

Cui Yue quickly made room for him. Bai Shaonan lay down and spread out, pulling the ghostling into his arms like a body pillow.

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Bai Shaonan gently kissed Cui Yue's forehead. As his consciousness drifted off, he was hit with the realization that in their tussle just now, he had sensed not a hint of sexual undertone. The little hotpot didn't blush

once from start to finish, but instead prepared to defend his chastity with the ferocity of going to a brawl. Conversely, the Bai Shaonan of Cui Yue's dream had successfully coerced the little hotpot into a bright flush.

Bai Shaonan could feel his jealousy spill over.

In contrast to Bai Shaonan's jealousy-infused slumber, when Qin Feng arrived at the dorms and slept on Cui Yue's old bunk, Cao Zhongnan didn't go into heat like all the previous times. Instead, he only stuck his head out to glance at Qin Feng before going back to sleep.

Qin Feng never looked a gift horse in the mouth. He took off his suit and went immediately to sleep until half past six in the evening, when he was woken up by a stirring sensation in his body.

"Are you done yet?" Qin Feng flipped off the covers and cursed at Cao Zhongnan.

Cao Zhongnan was just starting to have fun. Not only did the warning in Qin Feng's tone fail to frighten him, he continued to slowly tease the secretary as he shot a seductive glance at Qin Feng. Of course he could see the way Qin Feng's eyes were half closed in pleasure.

Qin Feng looked up at the clock on the wall. There was still some time to go before work. To be honest, he knew this would happen when he decided to sleep over; it was fortunate that Cao Zhongnan even allowed him some time to rest.

After the fun was over, Cao Zhongnan blissfully lay on the bed, smiling like a cat that had gotten its way. On the other hand, Qin Feng went to take a shower as if nothing had happened before walking out in the nude to redress in the clothes he'd stripped from.

Cao Zhongnan drifted up to help him with the buttons and took the chance to let his hands wander.

"I saw Director Fu Zhaoyi come to school yesterday. Does he not need to cooperate with the investigation?" Just as Qin Feng was about to push

away the roving hands, Cao Zhongnan's words made him pause and focus on the conversation.

"Fu Zhaoyi was here?"

"Yeah. I was wondering who the owner of that luxury car was and finally realized that it was Director Fu." Cao Zhongnan giggled. "Though, if Professor Chen hadn't greeted him, I wouldn't have recognized him for sure."

"Which Professor Chen?" Qin Feng pursued. As a director of the school in name only, Fu Zhaoyi never cared much for the developments on campus. Yet he was now having private meetings with the professors. Wasn't this proof that there was something afoot?

"The Professor Chen in PIGS who specializes in indoor haunting. I saw him get in the director's car. They were probably going to dinner?" Cao Zhongnan said.

Qin Feng's gaze darkened. Any staff of U of U NHC knew of the feud between their big boss Bai Shaonan and the school's directors, yet this Professor Chen dared to initiate contact with the board…

No. Fu Zhaoyi had dared to reach his hand into the school, right under Qin Feng's eyes. Was the board not enough to satisfy him anymore?

"I heard that Director Fu has a crush on you…" Cao Zhongnan quickly shot Qin Feng a glance as he carefully moved on to the real reason he had mentioned Fu Zhaoyi. "Is he trying to get information on you through Professor Chen?"

Qin Feng was speechless for a moment. He never thought that, aside from Bai Shaonan with his love-addled brain, there would be another ghost in hell who believed such obvious bullshit.

"… I'll handle this myself."

"Are you saying you're going to reject Director Fu?"

"There's no possibility of there being anything between us, even if we went through two hundred lifetimes together."

“Really?”

“Really.”

Cao Zhongnan looked overjoyed. The sight also brought a slight smile to Qin Feng’s face, though it quickly disappeared. With the conversation they just had, were they… lovers now? No, they weren’t.

It was one thing to fool around, but casually exchanging heartfelt sentiments was not something Qin Feng had planned on.

Irritation flashed through Qin Feng’s mind. Since when was Cao Zhongnan able to affect him with his words and gestures?

It was time for him to reconsider their relationship.

Qin Feng’s expression fell abruptly as he finished dressing and left. Watching Qin Feng’s figure float away, Cao Zhongnan’s gaze gradually cooled down like a glistening fountain slowly turning into a rippleless pool of dead water.

“There better not be anything between you two, or else I’ll never let you get away with it.”

Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue spent a peaceful morning together. Simply put, nothing at all happened between the two ghosts pressed together in sleep.

As one of the aforementioned ghosts, Bai Shaonan claimed that he would love for something to happen, but he’d fallen dead asleep as soon as he closed his eyes. He didn’t even know that Cui Yue had gotten up in the middle of the morning to go to the bathroom.

“It’s okay, you’re just too tired,” Cui Yue tried to reassure him. Bai Shaonan had been in a downcast mood ever since he had woken up. He was just short of squirreling himself away into a dark corner.

“I never used to be like this. I could stay up for three days and still have lots of energy,” Bai Shaonan replied.

"You went to negotiate with Judge Yanluo, which naturally took a lot of energy, so it makes sense that you're more tired." Abiding by Qin Feng's order of taking good care of the fatherless Bai Shaonan, Cui Yue continued to comfort him. Even so, his eyes were not on Bai Shaonan as he said these words of consolation but instead on the milk incense sticks in the microwave.

When Qin Feng returned to the office, Cui Yue had already finished his milk incense and left for the library. Bai Shaonan, on the other hand, refused to leave. It was necessary that he repeat what had just happened to Qin Feng.

As the veins popped on his forehead, Qin Feng finished listening. "So?" he asked coldly.

"Do you think I'm going through menopause?" Bai Shaonan felt on edge.

"Do you menstruate?" Qin Feng sneered before asking.

"I just checked online. Apparently, lack of vitality and decreased libido is one of the physiological signs of menopause." Bai Shaonan pursed his lips worriedly.

Qin Feng's eye twitched nonstop. He'd only just mocked Bai Shaonan in the morning, and that very evening, his boss had fully adopted the female role as his own. He already had his hands full with Cao Zhongnan, and he truly had no patience for this. "Get out there and find someone to burn you some White Phoenix Pills to treat yourself then. Aren't you very busy with a lot of research to do? What are you still doing here?"

Bai Shaonan threw Qin Feng a puzzled look. He wondered if Qin Feng had eaten explosives for dinner. Why else would he be in such a bad mood? Then again, since Qin Feng was kicking him out, he'd rather not stay and continue to be on the receiving end of a verbal beating. After passing on some work-related information, he left.

Facing an empty office, Qin Feng finally looked somewhat calmer. He settled weakly into his seat. Logically, he knew that it was time to start work, but emotionally, he didn't feel like doing anything.

After wasting more than ten minutes, Qin Feng finally reignited his spirit. However, he didn't research Cui Yue's origin as promised but instead Fu Zhaoyi's past. He'd already gone through the backgrounds of the board directors, but the results were disappointing. This time, using Professor Chen as a lead, he vowed to dig up everything there was about Fu Zhaoyi or he would change his surname.

In the library, the well-rested Cui Yue was flipping through texts in preparation for the cursed-homes homework. He didn't even notice when Cao Zhongnan came to sit beside him.

"What are you looking for, a-Yue?"

"Hey, when did you get here, Cao B?" Cui Yue lifted his head up from the pile of books. The bright sparkle in his eyes made Cao Zhongnan's hair stand on end.

Not only that, Cui Yue wasn't delving into the usual reading material of a PIGS student. Since when did students in the malevolent spirit program need to research traditional Mongolian clothing?

"What are you doing with these books?"

"I was inspired yesterday. Won't it be especially terrifying to see a bunch of nomadic tribal people running around indoors?" Cui Yue was gleeful as he said this, as though it was the best idea nobody had ever thought of.

Cao Zhongnan remembered the address Cui Yue had picked out. If he remembered correctly, it was a newly built seaside luxury condo. Every unit came with floor-to-ceiling windows with a first-class view. If the ocean was right outside, then where did the nomadic tribes come in?

This wasn't Mongolia. Was Cui Yue trying to break another record for lowest grades by cosplaying as a *group* of Mongolian ghosts?

"You're just one ghost, a-Yue. You can't achieve the effect of a bunch of nomadic tribal people running around." Cao Zhongnan didn't have the heart to rain directly on his parade, so he tried to redirect his friend in a roundabout way.

"Yes, you're right. I was also just thinking about that problem." There was excitement on Cui Yue's face. "So I plan to dress up as a female Khagan to stand at the target's bedside as he's drifting off to sleep. That'll scare him for sure."

Cao Zhongnan fell into silence. Dressing up as a Khagan was bad enough, but why did he have to emphasize that he would be a female Khagan?

Cui Yue continued, "Don't you have leftover makeup at your place? Let me borrow some. I need to do my face before I go up there, to ensure that it goes perfectly."

Cao Zhongnan remembered the result from their last makeup session, and the thought occurred to him that Mongolian clothing might not do it but seeing a woman with a face of heavy makeup by someone's bedside in the middle of the night was bound to be horrifying. "Sure, do you want to come to the dorm and pick it out yourself?"

"Good idea." Cui Yue nodded.

"Oh, right, since we don't have class tomorrow night, I plan to go topside to finish the assignment. Do you want to come with?"

"Nah. I can't leave campus by myself," Cui Yue answered.

It was the first that Cao Zhongnan knew about this, so he immediately followed up, "Why? Was it something Dean Bai said?"

An awkward expression appeared on Cui Yue's face. Cao Zhongnan was only an ordinary student. Cui Yue didn't want to drag him into the great Bai-Fu war. However, since Cao Zhongnan looked as though he wouldn't be lending any makeup until Cui Yue told him, he had no choice

but to tell an abridged version of the story. "Don't tell any other ghost—but I got together with Bai Shaonan."

"And then? What does that have to do with not being allowed to go up?"

"It has everything to do with it!" Cui Yue was so surprised at Cao Zhongnan's indifference, his voice rose in pitch. "Think of what kind of ghost he is! If my identity got out, there'll be tons of reprehensible characters after me!"

"Shhh, quiet—this is the library." Cao Zhongnan held down the overexcited Cui Yue and whispered, "A-Yue, did you forget that Dean Bai never publicized your relationship? If no one knows about you, who would be bored enough to target a student of Northern Hell Campus?"

Cui Yue arched his brow and glanced at Cao Zhongnan. He was almost going to say that "Lovingly He" had already targeted him. In the next second, however, he also realized that something wasn't right. The only ghosts who knew that he was being threatened were Bai Shaonan, Qin Feng, and the guards; even the Fu family should still be in the dark. And now, with Bai Qinghe dead, why would anyone continue to threaten him?

"Your relationship is a secret that no other ghost knows. The idea that some nefarious ghost is trying to hurt you could be made up by Dean Bai. Maybe he's generally worried about your safety? Be honest, a-Yue, don't you want Dean Bai to see you in a new light?" Cao Zhongnan analyzed.

Cui Yue was a little convinced. It was true. "Lovingly He" had only murdered Fu family ghosts because of the bad blood between the Bai and Fu families. Now that Bai Qinghe was gone, he should be safe, right?

"Tomorrow evening? Okay." After some consideration, Cui Yue decided to accept Cao Zhongnan's invitation. The words "don't you want Dean Bai to see you in a new light" had struck a chord in him. He'd always been in a protected position. Perhaps it was time to show his boyfriend that he was also a worthy malevolent spirit.

"A-Yue, you can't tell Dean Bai and the others, or they'll get some ghost to protect you for sure. You have to do this by yourself to show them what you're capable of," said Cao Zhongnan.

"Yes, Cao B, you're right." Cao Zhongnan's words had stoked Cui Yue's spirit; he was *this* close to making a blood vow that he would definitely achieve a grade that would shock Bai Shaonan to his core.

After watching a few makeup tutorials with Cao Zhongnan, Cui Yue returned to the office reception room full of confidence. Qin Feng happened to catch a glimpse of his unbridled ridiculousness.

"Cui Yue." After a second of contemplation, Qin Feng decided to ask. After all, Cui Yue had a history of overconfidence.

"What is it?" Cui Yue stopped obediently. If he had a dog tail, it'd be wagging furiously at this point.

"You look very happy. Did something good happen?"

"Hee hee, you noticed." Cui Yue didn't forget his pact with Cao Zhongnan, so he only divulged his idea for scaring the target.

Nomadic tribe? Qin Feng had to purse his lips hard to keep from laughing out loud, but he didn't comment on Cui Yue's concept and instead asked, "You're going to go topside?"

Alarm bells sounded in Cui Yue's mind, but he made a show of rare composure. "I'll talk it over with Dean Bai."

Qin Feng didn't suspect anything and only nodded before advising him, "It's kind of short notice, so you better tell him tomorrow morning."

Obviously, Cui Yue didn't actually tell Bai Shaonan about going to the human realm, and Qin Feng also didn't expect Cui Yue's brain to suddenly be as empty as it was. When he traded shifts with Bai Shaonan, he didn't bring up Cui Yue's assignment and only exchanged some of the recent information he'd uncovered.

Cui Yue was surprisingly smart about hiding his upcoming trip. He knew that he was bad at keeping things in, so he chose to go to sleep early.

That's right, if he was asleep, then he wouldn't talk to Bai Shaonan and wouldn't have to worry that his little plan would be found out.

Bai Shaonan came back to see Cui Yue fast asleep, and even laughed to himself about how the little ghost couldn't stay up. However, when he pulled the ghost-shaped body pillow into his arms, he did it much more gently than usual for fear of waking up the little hotpot.

Watching Cui Yue's sleeping face, Bai Shaonan made a silent vow: he was willing to give up everything he had in exchange for the privilege of seeing this peaceful expression every day.

When night descended and Cui Yue opened his eyes, Bai Shaonan had already left. The messy corner of the sofa was the only sign that a ghost had lain there.

He was the one who'd chosen to avoid Bai Shaonan by sleeping, but when Cui Yue didn't see his boyfriend before falling asleep or after waking up, he still felt a little dejected amid the feeling of relief.

He would prove to Bai Shaonan that he was capable, Cui Yue convinced himself.

After dinner, Cui Yue came to Cao Zhongnan's dorm room, where the clothes were already prepared. Due to limited time and budget, he only managed to find an old garment that he drew crude motifs on with a marker. In place of a wig, he found a brand-new mop head and dyed it black. Cui Yue wasn't quite satisfied with the result, but one sentence from Cao Zhongnan dismissed his worry: the target would be sleeping anyway and wouldn't notice the details, no matter how exquisite.

Having given himself a horrendous makeover, Cui Yue was forced to don a face mask and sunglasses. If they floated out looking like this, they would certainly become the newest attraction in the underworld.

The two ghosts traveled up to the human realm together. Cao Zhongnan happened to choose a unit in the same condo, so after arranging to meet at the gate in one hour, they went on their separate ways. Cui Yue

approached the outside of the apartment on his own, took a deep breath, pulled off his mask and shades, then eagerly floated inside.

It was the middle of the night. The living room was pitch black, with only a scatter of light from outside. Cui Yue took a moment to admire the luxurious decor that exceeded his imagination before going straight for the bedroom to kickstart his face-to-face encounter.

This time, he would definitely succeed.

Cui Yue went straight for the bed, except when his eyes swept over the large king-size, his enthusiasm immediately shifted to surprise.

There was no one there.

If the resident wasn't in bed and asleep in the middle of the night, then where was he?

Cui Yue quickly circled the apartment once, but the study, the washroom, the patio, and even the kitchen showed no sign of a human. He started to panic. Professor Chen had said that all the residential units on the list would stay occupied for the near future. So why wasn't anyone here?

Unless whoever lived here went off on a trip? No, if they were traveling, Professor Chen would have known about it. Cui Yue looked all around when suddenly he thought of a new possibility: maybe the inhabitant went to the hotel with his girlfriend?

But why would anyone stay at a hotel when they lived in a place like this?

Cui Yue couldn't help but chuckle. But very soon, he couldn't bring himself to laugh anymore. If the target wasn't here, then he'd have to come back on another day.

He'd only wanted to do well on this assignment and prove himself to Bai Shaonan. Why was fate so cruel to him?

Cui Yue floated back to the living room sadly. If the target still hadn't come back in an hour, he'd have no choice but to return to the underworld with Cao Zhongnan. He floated up to the lavish dining table and plopped

himself down in the chair at its head. He was about to let out a fart to express his frustration when he saw a dot of bright green flashing above the television like some kind of insect emitting a glow to attract mates.

How could there be fireflies in this forest of concrete and steel? Cui Yue floated over curiously to check it out. Just as he leaned forward, a voice suddenly sounded behind him, and his body stiffened automatically.

"Found you at last, my child."

Cui Yue's pupils slowly diffused. His subconscious told him that this was a ghost he knew, but he couldn't remember who it was.

"Come. It's time you started working for Daddy."

Cui Yue turned around and gazed at the other ghost's back. Yes, how could he forget when this person was so important to him.

It wasn't until two hours after the pair of brats left the ghost realm that Qin Feng finally received a report from the guards, telling him that Cui Yue and Cao Zhongnan had gone topside. The report also included a photo of Cui Yue pulling off his mask to get some air, revealing his inimitable face beneath. Qin Feng calmly deleted the photo before calling Bai Shaonan, telling him to go and pick up his restless little mate.

And as for Cao Zhongnan, Qin Feng claimed that he was in no danger, and to pay him no mind.

Since Qin Feng had submitted a request, the ghostly guards made a special trip up to the human realm to bring the "felons" back. When Bai Shaonan arrived at the entry point in the border between the human and ghost realm, the two ghosts had already been forcibly brought back by the guards. A few who were friendly with Bai Shaonan even produced some makeup remover and insisted that Cui Yue clean his face first. They worried that Dean Bai would see his student like this and become so angry that he might dismantle the border crossing. Thus, Bai Shaonan was lucky enough

to miss his boyfriend's horrendous makeover and saw only the trembling expression that said, "It was wrong of me."

Protective of his own ghosts as he was, Bai Shaonan didn't make a scene in front of the guards. He glared coldly at Cui Yue before snapping, "Let's go."

Cui Yue followed meekly behind him and stayed quiet the whole way, not daring to make any sound. He knew full well looking at Bai Shaonan's stormy expression that he was absolutely doomed.

Bai Shaonan didn't go back to campus and instead brought Cui Yue directly home. Like an angry parent bringing his troublemaker son home from school, Bai Shaonan sat down on the couch and gestured for Cui Yue to stand in front of him to receive the full dressing-down.

"Do you know what you did was wrong?"

"Yes."

"How was it wrong?"

"I shouldn't have snuck up to the human realm without telling any other ghosts."

"You knew exactly what you did. So, did you do it on purpose even knowing that you shouldn't have?"

"No…"

The sheepish tone drew an angry glare from Bai Shaonan. Even after multiple warnings and reminders, Cui Yue would still ignore his words. This complete disregard the ghostling had for his own safety was exactly why Bai Shaonan had smashed his phone on the ground as soon as he received the call from Qin Feng.

Bai Shaonan knew what Cui Yue was thinking—he simply wanted to prove his capability, to prove that he wasn't a bottom-of-the-barrel slacker anymore. Bai Shaonan welcomed this ambition from Cui Yue, but he shouldn't have snuck away without saying a word at such a crucial time. Fortunately, no ghost had set their sights on him this time, and with the

notice from the guards, Bai Shaonan had been able to retrieve the ghostling in short time.

"I'm very disappointed in your behavior, Cui Yue. From this moment on, you will stay only at home and will not be allowed to go anywhere, not even class, until the bodyguards from the Judge's court arrive," Bai Shaonan said coldly. The ghostly guards couldn't accompany Cui Yue up to the human realm, but they could at least keep an eye on him at all times. They would be both protection as well as surveillance. Bai Shaonan himself had no way of keeping watch on the restless Cui Yue twenty-four hours a day, so this was the only solution.

Bai Shaonan would set a boundary outside the door when he went out, and from this moment on, Cui Yue would be confined to the house as punishment.

That's right. This was the exact same boundary that Qin Feng often used to trap Bai Shaonan for forced overtime work.

"I understand…" Since he was at fault and had been caught red-handed by Bai Shaonan, Cui Yue knew there was no room for negotiation. There was no way he could hand in the assignment, but he could at least fight for the right to commute to class. "Then, when will the bodyguards get here?"

"Not sure." Bai Shaonan peered sideways at Cui Yue, deliberately not giving a clear date. It would keep him on his toes for the next few days at least.

Even in this circumstance, Cui Yue was still concerned about his schoolwork. If he really cared so much about school, he shouldn't have snuck up to the human realm on his own. Besides, didn't he have a boyfriend who was also a dean at the school? Whatever happened, couldn't he just do a little begging and ask for a healthy dose of nepotism? Bai Shaonan grew angrier the more he thought about it. How could his little hotpot be so stupid?!

Cui Yue glanced at Bai Shaonan with an ingratiating gaze. He shifted toward the sofa with what he thought was a discreet but actually incredibly obvious movement, until he was in front of Bai Shaonan's eyes. "I shouldn't have done that, Shaonan. I'm sorry."

Bai Shaonan let out a cold *humph*. Such a childish appeal from Cui Yue couldn't sway him.

Cui Yue didn't know what to do as he stood frozen in place. He bit his lip and then thought of something, so he slowly kneeled down beside Bai Shaonan's feet. Seeing that Bai Shaonan had silently accepted his motion, he first reached out a hand to touch the dean's leg and then rested his head on Bai Shaonan's lap, whispering, "I won't do that again, Shaonan."

Bai Shaonan peered at Cui Yue. It surprised the dean that this wooden head of the ghostling's would know to show vulnerability when pleading for forgiveness. Normally, Cui Yue was adamantly against calling him "Shaonan," but it sure came out easily just now. A spark of curiosity got the better of him, and he wondered if he continued like this and kept his distance, how far Cui Yue would go.

Cui Yue thought he had already taken a big stride, but still Bai Shaonan didn't react. The gears in the head resting on Bai Shaonan's lap turned furiously, trying to think of any other way to make Bai Shaonan forgive him.

Bai Shaonan felt Cui Yue stiffen up, and sighed. The recent disastrous lesson had already taught him not to expect anything from the little hotpot, but he couldn't help hoping at each chance that the ghostling would give him a pleasant surprise.

Obviously, not this time.

Bai Shaonan reached out and pinched Cui Yue's cheek, and when the ghostling felt the pain, he pulled the whole ghost onto his lap and sealed the startled gasp with his lips before it had a chance to get out.

If it wasn't for the yet-to-be-approved application, he would have used another method to let Cui Yue know of his fury.

He wanted to flirt with death? Fine. Bai Shaonan would ride Cui Yue until he was between life and death. If the little hotpot would reach his demise either way, Bai Shaonan didn't mind being the executioner that kept Cui Yue from getting out of bed until the guards arrived.

Cui Yue didn't have time to react to Bai Shaonan's sudden kiss and simply followed the dean's lead, opening his mouth in submission and allowing Bai Shaonan to march right in, all while Cui Yue rested himself on top of the other ghost's body.

Ghosts didn't need to breathe, so Bai Shaonan wasn't worried about asphyxiating his little boyfriend and made out for as long as he wanted. In order to placate Bai Shaonan, Cui Yue also didn't resist, which was why when the dean finally released him, Cui Yue's lips were predictably swollen.

He might not be able to take Cui Yue in bed, but Bai Shaonan did manage at least part of a feast, and his mood took an immediate turn for the better. Ever since Cui Yue denied him any sort of intimacy, he had been so depraved that even stealing an occasional kiss was enough to fill him with joy for a long time.

Cui Yue watched as a small smile appeared on Bai Shaonan's lips, and gave him a gentle tug, saying quietly, "… Should we do it?"

Bai Shaonan was stunned. He looked back at Cui Yue with unconcealed shock in his eyes. The words coming from Cui Yue's mouth were as absurd as if he'd said, "Qin Feng is actually a polar bear."

Is the little hotpot willing to go this far for my forgiveness? That was Bai Shaonan's first thought.

Did the little hotpot somehow take the wrong medicine today and end up with a personality change? *No, then did he take that eves delight thing again*? That was Bai Shaonan's second thought.

After rejecting several unreasonable hypotheses in a row, Bai Shaonan had recovered from his initial shock. To be honest, in the past, he would have grabbed the ghost without question and charged upstairs by now, refusing to stop even if the little hotpot changed his mind. But today, suddenly hearing this from Cui Yue, he somehow didn't feel any hint of impulse. In fact, he had the wherewithal to carefully study the ghostling's expression, attempting to find the reason behind Cui Yue's sudden proposition.

Cui Yue knew that words once said could not be taken back. Though he was as red as a cooked shrimp, since Bai Shaonan didn't answer, he could only stammer again, "Don't… you want to?"

"I do, of course I do." Bai Shaonan covered Cui Yue's flushed face with his hand. "But, Cui Yue, are you really sure?"

Cui Yue's blush only deepened, but his voice was determined. "I'm sure."

Bai Shaonan's black irises became even deeper and darker. He first gave Cui Yue another kiss in way of consolation before carrying the ghostling to the large bed in the bedroom. He asked again, "You're really sure?"

Lying in bed, Cui Yue looked up at Bai Shaonan before circling his arms around the dean's neck, demonstrating his determination with a kiss.

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Unlike the kiss in the living room, Bai Shaonan didn't linger with his lips. As soon as Cui Yue closed his eyes, Bai Shaonan lifted a hand and brought it down on the ghostling's nape, mercilessly rendering him unconscious.

Cui Yue passed out on the bed, looking no different than if he were asleep. Bai Shaonan cast his eyes down, gently brushed his fingers over Cui Yue's closed eyelids, before letting his hand slowly trace Cui Yue's icy cold cheek down to his neck, where a few buttons had already been undone.

His movements were gentle, and there was loving affection in the way his fingers lingered over Cui Yue, but when he looked up, so much conflict was contained in those eyes that there was no room for even a sliver of emotion.

After imprinting this image of Cui Yue in his mind, Bai Shaonan rearranged the ghostling's disheveled clothes, then gave Qin Feng a call.

"Where are you?"

"Looking for records at the Deceased Ghosts Department in the Judge's court."

Bai Shaonan's voice was unusually hoarse, exactly the same as when he first found out about Bai Qinghe's passing. Qin Feng immediately asked, "What happened?"

"I remember my father deliberately built his research lab on land that's under the Judge's name to prevent any ghosts from getting ideas and acting

on it." Bai Shaonan didn't answer Qin Feng's question, and continued, "I'm talking about the one used specifically for me."

"Where are you and Cui Yue right now?" Bai Shaonan's flat voice only made Qin Feng more certain that something must have happened, and there was only ever one ghost who could make him ask this question.

"At my house. Don't worry, I'm calm." Bai Shaonan watched Cui Yue's sleeping face. "Since it's under the Judge's name, theoretically, the guards wouldn't dare to touch it, right?"

"I haven't yet received any news of ghostly guards making their way over there." Qin Feng put the records he was looking at back in their place before he strode briskly out the door. "I'm coming now."

"No need. Why don't you go straight there and wait for me," said Bai Shaonan. "I'll bring Cui Yue over there."

Bai Shaonan ended the call immediately after saying this. Qin Feng hovered in place for a while, staring at his screen. Bai Shaonan had always shamelessly insisted on using the nickname "little hotpot," but now he was calling Cui Yue by his full name. It was indicative of the severity of the situation.

Qin Feng narrowed his eyes. Something happened with Cui Yue in only the half day that he'd been away from their sight. What had happened in the human realm?

When he recalled Cui Yue's coconspirator, Qin Feng felt a wave of pain tearing through his heart. He knew then that the erotic drama he starred in was also about to come to an end.

It's fine, Qin Feng tried to numb himself, *only stomach pains from the stress, that's all.* He refocused his mind and left for the agreed upon location to meet Bai Shaonan.

As soon as Qin Feng entered the lab, he saw Cui Yue already laid out on the operating table and connected to equipment. Bai Shaonan was beside

him, adjusting every single constraint so that they wouldn't make him too uncomfortable.

That piece of equipment was used annually to check whether Bai Shaonan had "turned," in other words, whether he was still loyal to Judge Yanluo's court. Qin Feng's heart sank at the sight. If they needed to bring this out, it meant that Cui Yue might have been mind controlled.

"You're here?" Bai Shaonan glimpsed Qin Feng out of the corner of his eyes. "I've already punched in the values, just check it over. If there aren't any problems, then we can start."

For Bai Shaonan, the test meant that he got to sleep on the operating table for a full three hours, then wake up and yawn, and it was over. Bai Qinghe and Qin Feng were responsible for the rest. But now, the one lying there was a different ghost. Qin Feng glanced at the unconscious Cui Yue, then back at the green, glowing screen, and decided to start the test first before asking about the details.

Qin Feng carefully checked the values, made sure nothing had been missed, then pressed the start button. The operating table was immediately dowsed in a white light. Bai Shaonan had already been forced to retreat to a different room but still stared intently through the glass partition at Cui Yue.

"Talk, tell me what happened." Qin Feng came in from another door with two cups of freshly made coffee in his hands; one for himself, and one for Bai Shaonan.

Bai Shaonan was an avid troublemaker when he was young and unruly, which nearly drove Bai Qinghe insane. The doctor had no other choice but to find methods to keep the jade spirit in check so he could get some peace. As soon as Bai Shaonan drank this, it could keep him calm for five to six hours at a time. Bai Qinghe hadn't wanted the outside world to know about the existence of this substance lest other ghosts use it to control Bai Shaonan. Qin Feng only discovered the forbidden formula while secretly flipping through Bai Qinghe's research records.

Every time Bai Shaonan was overstimulated by the board of directors, he would do some convincing and force Bai Shaonan to drink the substance, just like now.

"Something's off about Cui Yue." Bai Shaonan accepted the coffee and took a sip without a second thought.

"What do you mean 'off'?" Qin Feng asked.

"He wants to do it with me." Bai Shaonan hesitated. "Not out of his own will. It's like he feels compelled to do it."

"You mean he's trying to seduce you." Qin Feng cast his eyes down. Frankly, he couldn't imagine how Cui Yue, with that head and that brain, could possibly seduce Bai Shaonan. But since beauty was in the eyes of the beholder, if Bai Shaonan said so, then it must be true.

Though, what was the point of seducing a famished wolf that dreamt of eating him all day?

If the question occurred to Qin Feng, Bai Shaonan had naturally thought of it as well. "There's no reason for Cui Yue to do this. Even if he made me angry, he never would've thought to do this. There must be something pushing him into making a move like this."

"You said he seduced you, so did you do it with him?"

"… No."

"Is there something wrong with you?" Qin Feng asked, glancing down at Bai Shaonan's lower body.

"I'm just fine, thank you. I can go seven times in one night." Bai Shaonan huffed. What the hell was Qin Feng doing asking about that?

"Then we don't have to worry that Cui Yue transmitted something to you." Qin Feng nodded.

"We've made out multiple times. If that's the case, I would've gotten it already." Bai Shaonan saw Qin Feng's expression fall, and quickly added, "I'll get checked too once Cui Yue is finished."

Qin Feng sighed. They had been too careless. Back then, they should have brought Cui Yue here immediately for examination instead of putting it off.

"I went to see Fu Niangui." Bai Shaonan suddenly changed the subject. "He told me an interesting rumor. Back when they were recruited as a group into the Fu family, Fu Zhaoyi's name wasn't on the roster. He was forcibly added at the last minute."

Qin Feng took a moment to process this gossip. "So?"

"So, many ghosts aren't happy with Fu Zhaoyi since they were about to surpass him, but all of a sudden, he was on the same level as them. How can they stand him?" Bai Shaonan smirked. "But here's the question: what kind of ability did Fu Zhaoyi have that the Fu family would make an exception for him?"

"I couldn't find the reason Fu Zhaoyi was recruited, or even any records of him before that. It looks like someone had deliberately wiped everything." Qin Feng glanced at the monitor and checked that it was still working properly. "There's rumors among the ghosts that he'd been recruited based on an essay about creating ghost soldiers, but I couldn't find one. Meanwhile, it's been years and Fu Zhaoyi hasn't managed to create a single ghost soldier."

"Fu Ruofei let slip once that there are also many ghosts within the Fu family attempting to dig up Fu Zhaoyi's past. But like you, they couldn't find anything."

"If even the ghosts within the Fu family couldn't find anything, we won't be able to dig up much in a few short days."

"Right, and since Fu Zhaoyi joined the board of directors, they were even less likely to go looking… This is how Fu Zhaoyi's position has slowly cemented in place."

As they talked about the board of directors, Qin Feng suddenly remembered what Cao Zhongnan had said. Although he was still uncertain

whether it was true, he thought it best to tell Bai Shaonan while they were already talking. "Professor Chen from PIGS is in bed with Fu Zhaoyi. Cao B… said he saw them together."

When he used Cao Zhongnan's nickname, Qin Feng felt a moment of awkwardness. Fortunately, Bai Shaonan didn't notice.

"Professor Chen with that huge belly like he's six months pregnant?" Clearly, Bai Shaonan misunderstood the implication behind "in bed," as he continued, "I thought Fu Zhaoyi had a crush on you? Since when did he gain such unusual taste? That's some oddly thirsty behavior."

"No, I'm talking about them seeing each other in private. Professor Chen seems to be under Fu Zhaoyi's command. Cui Yue was sneaking up to the human realm to complete the assignment he gave out," Qin Feng said.

Bai Shaonan narrowed his eyes. Cui Yue went out on his own because of this Professor Chen and started showing problems after he came back. It would be a stretch to assume it was all a mere coincidence.

There was a long time to go before Cui Yue's tests would finish, so Bai Shaonan gave this Professor Chen a call. He wanted to test the waters, under the guise of checking on Cui Yue's academic performance.

"What is it, Dean Bai?" Professor Chen's voice sounded a little nervous at the dean's spontaneous call.

"Not much. I heard you just gave out an assignment that involved going to the human realm. I'm just a little concerned about Cui Yue. As you know, his wild imagination, coupled with his skill level, seriously worries me." Bai Shaonan's voice was full of genuine distress, as if he really had made the call out of concern for Cui Yue.

"Don't worry, Dean Bai. Cui Yue is doing pretty well in class. He answers questions and takes diligent notes—he's a good student. I believe that his grades won't be so bad." Professor Chen had thought that Bai Shaonan wanted him for something important, but he was only calling as a

dean doing a perfunctory check on his students, so he immediately went for flattery, hinting that he would surely give Cui Yue a satisfactory mark.

"Then, how is Cui Yue's assignment in the human realm going?" Bai Shaonan knew that Professor Chen had misunderstood his intention. However, that suited him perfectly since it gave him an excuse to ask about Cui Yue's performance.

"Oh, that… let me see… So they were actually asked to scare the inhabitants of specific residential units. I've prepared those locations so that, once the students complete their assignments, I would be notified straight away… Oh, great. Cui Yue has already finished his task, and I've given him a score of… B minus." Professor Chen went through the various folders on his computer as he spoke and finally found Cui Yue's record.

"B minus?" Bai Shaonan was surprised. "That high?"

"A B minus isn't a high score—it's just middling." Professor Chen wasn't in close contact with the other professors and had only heard of Cui Yue's name with no further knowledge of his grades.

"What did Cui Yue do?" Bai Shaonan followed up. He knew that there had to be something wrong judging by this grade alone. From what he knew, Cui Yue regularly earned grades between a C and D and could never achieve a B minus.

The first PIGS in history to be doubted because of a B minus was his very own boyfriend. Bai Shaonan was upset just thinking about it.

"He… he made himself into a drowned ghost, and the unit happened to be by the sea, so it fit the theme," said Professor Chen.

"All right, I understand. It really is thanks to your guidance that Cui Yue was able to make such progress." Bai Shaonan said a few more words of flattery before hanging up the phone. Then he relayed the conversation to Qin Feng.

"No way, Cui Yue told me that he was going to dress up as a Mongolian ghost," Qin Feng immediately said. "Has Northern Hell Campus

fallen so hard that it's okay to hire other ghosts to complete assignments for students?"

"Didn't Cao B go up there with him?" No doubt Bai Shaonan believed Qin Feng. Between Mongolian ghosts and a drowned ghost, the impressively inventive first option was no doubt Cui Yue's own idea. His boyfriend wouldn't even consider an idea as mundane as a drowned ghost.

"Cao Zhongnan… I'll interrogate him personally." Qin Feng's expression darkened and his gaze turned as chilling as an unsheathed blade.

"You— Just watch it. He's still one of our students, after all." Bai Shaonan only knew that Cao Zhongnan had been rolling with Qin Feng but knew nothing of their vacillating love-hate relationship. Seeing that Qin Feng looked as though he was going to fight the other ghost to the death, Bai Shaonan couldn't help but remind him in case the consequences of the ensuing melodrama required him to pick up the pieces.

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing," Qin Feng answered flatly before going silent. His gaze returned to the equipment monitor, refusing to discuss the topic of Cao Zhongnan any further.

Bai Shaonan thought it best to not pursue the matter. He also returned his gaze to the monitor as if that would make the results show up a little faster.

At the end of the three hours, Bai Shaonan practically lunged forward and pressed his face to the screen, looking at the string of results shown there. Then, he whipped his head around and asked Qin Feng, "What does this mean? Explain it to me."

"Why don't you check for yourself…"

Qin Feng suddenly paused and remembered that Bai Shaonan had always looked at the simplified version of the report after it had been cleaned up and summarized by Qin Feng. He'd never paid attention to what the individual values meant.

"Look at this, the standard value—or where you're at—is 2.5. Whereas Cui Yue is at 3.9." Qin Feng swept his eyes over the data and swiftly pointed out the category with the most obvious deviation.

"What does that mean?"

"It means that his capacity for being influenced is much higher than normal. Even an unintentional line from his creator would be completely accepted by Cui Yue as a command."

"It means that Cui Yue met his so-called creator when he was in the human realm, at which point he received the order to seduce me?"

"… You could say that, yes." Qin Feng nodded. Inside, he thought to himself that Cui Yue's creator didn't seem very smart, giving out a useless order like that. It should at least have been something more practical, like sneaking into the study or something.

"Can the order be removed?" asked Bai Shaonan.

"Theoretically, yes, but Cui Yue's number is way too high, so let's see why that is first." Qin Feng typed in a few commands on the keyboard, and the floor beside the operating table opened up. A gigantic spray gun rose up from within and started spewing a bright yellow fog at Cui Yue.

"You think someone's carved a pattern of suggestion on Cui Yue?" Bai Shaonan frowned. He knew exactly what that spray gun was. Every time the board thought that there was something wrong with him, they'd request that he get sprayed. In theory, it was to check if there was a suggestion pattern on his body that made him listen only to Bai Qinghe's commands.

There was an annoying side effect to this yellow spray, which was that if the target didn't use the specified bodywash after, their whole body would stink for three entire days. As Qin Feng had once described it while mocking him, "Even pigs don't smell this bad after wallowing in shit." Bai Shaonan had suspected numerous times that the board was only trying to punish him, and so he would squat shamelessly at a board member's house

after a spray and refuse to leave, taking turns with each one, so they could be equally affected.

"Of course, there are many methods for suggestion, but to get to a 3.9, there's no possibility other than a suggestion pattern." Qin Feng turned to Bai Shaonan. "You've already waited for three hours, so what's twenty minutes more?"

"No, it's just—the spray stinks so much. Will Cui Yue wake up?" Bai Shaonan asked.

"Don't worry. I added tranquilizer to the spray. He won't be woken up by the stench," Qin Feng promised. At this moment, they could assume that Cui Yue was under the control of the other party; there was no way he'd expose this laboratory to Cui Yue's eyes.

"The tranquilizer won't be harmful to him, right?"

"When you were little and refused to sleep, Bai Qinghe was always giving it to you."

Bai Shaonan shut his mouth.

With eighteen minutes left on the clock, Qin Feng's phone suddenly started ringing. Since it was a call from the Judge's court, he had to briefly leave the room and take it outside. However, shortly into the conversation, he heard a loud *BOOM* coming from inside the room, followed by the sound of glass shattering.

Qin Feng jumped in alarm, quickly ended the call with the court, and rushed back inside. When he got there, Bai Shaonan was already gone, leaving only a mess of broken glass shards on the floor and Cui Yue, who lay on the operating table, a yellow glow emitting from him. Qin Feng frowned as he approached, wondering how deeply ingrained the creator must have made the suggestion pattern to have this kind of effect. When he closed in and took a look, his features immediately twisted into a knot, and he instantly understood why Bai Shaonan had gone berserk.

The suggestion patterns were engraved directly onto Cui Yue's blood vessels. Even with no blood flowing through them, the vessels were still spread throughout the whole body. Cui Yue wasn't *just* an artificial life-form but more like a talking marionette.

Qin Feng carefully inspected the suggestion pattern. It seemed to have been set in place at the time of Cui Yue's creation. The possibility of removing it completely was probably less than nil. Considering the state of Cui Yue's body, the Judge surely wouldn't allow such an easily influenced garbage-disposing tool to roam free. He sighed and returned to the monitor to check again. Fortunately, as furious as Bai Shaonan was, he hadn't broken any equipment. Otherwise, Qin Feng would have immediately flown out himself to hunt Bai Shaonan down.

After fucking off outside, Bai Shaonan still hadn't come back, which gave Qin Feng time to compare the readings in detail. Unlike Bai Shaonan's values, which looked more or less consistent from year to year, Cui Yue's numbers alarmed him the more he looked. By the end, Qin Feng had crumpled onto the chair and began thinking for the first time since his creation how best to tell his boss about the mess before them without eliciting more wrath.

"So what's the situation?" As if he timed it, Bai Shaonan suddenly returned out of nowhere before Qin Feng could think of a plan.

The rims of Bai Shaonan's eyes were red, and his eyes bloodshot. Qin Feng looked at him, and suddenly understood that when Bai Shaonan first saw the surge of yellow glow, he'd already known the result. Right now, he was merely struggling with denial, hoping against hope that Qin Feng would come up with a lie.

"You know exactly what it is; do you really need me to tell you?" Qin Feng asked quietly. He couldn't bring himself to be the last straw on Bai Shaonan's back.

"I just…" Bai Shaonan lowered his gaze, but didn't finish the sentence. An odd smile stiffened around his lips, like he was on the verge between laughing and crying. It looked brutal as much as it was pathetic.

Bai Shaonan knew very well that Cui Yue couldn't be saved. He couldn't be saved even if Bai Shaonan possessed absolute power in the underworld, never mind that he was an atypical entity who needed to submit an application just to have sex.

More importantly, the only ghost capable of increasing the probability of success from a zero to a one, when it came to removing a suggestion pattern, was already gone.

Bai Qinghe was already scattered to the wind.

When Bai Qinghe died, Bai Shaonan still had the idea of vengeance to divert his attention. And now, taking down Cui Yue's creator was a pretty good diversion, but he no longer had the energy for it.

He wanted so much to brush everything aside and whisk Cui Yue away. But so what if he did? That cursed creator never intended for Cui Yue to live for long. Three activated suggestion patterns were enough to give a ghost a mental breakdown, not to mention there were so many on Cui Yue's body. If they all activated at the same time… the result was unthinkable.

Vengeance was a possibility for Bai Qinghe, but when it came to Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan suddenly felt like nothing would work. What good was vengeance? It was useless, that's what. Even if he slaughtered Cui Yue's creator a hundred thousand times, it still wouldn't allow them to have a happily ever after in the underworld.

When he saw Cui Yue covered in the suggestion patterns, Bai Shaonan felt like his whole world had been torn apart right before him. He wanted to open his eyes wide so he could get a better look but couldn't see anything. He wanted to prick up his ears to listen but found that he couldn't hear anything. He wanted to speak, but his vocal chords refused; the cries and howls were all stuck in his throat, unable to find release. He once thought

that even a garbage disposal like himself could have a mate just like the other living spirits on Earth, but looking back, he realized that it had only been a prank from fate.

Bai Shaonan looked even more miserable and wretched than when he found out about Bai Qinghe's death. Qin Feng wouldn't be surprised if he dropped everything in the next moment and imploded. He knew that Bai Shaonan wouldn't be able to hear any words of consolation at this point, so he decided to get everything out in the open at once. "You know the conclusion, now… let me give you a summary of what happened.

"The information shows that Cui Yue was created a long time ago, with the preliminary speculation that he's even older than you. For some unknown reason, he was neglected but forcibly activated again recently.

"There are a large number of suggestion patterns on him, this you already know. However, there's a pattern at the base of his skull that's different from the others. The pattern looks intermittent, and seems weaker, as if it was engraved by an amateur. There's also the possibility that Cui Yue was woken up right after this pattern was made."

"Dad and son," Bai Shaonan said quietly. He had no mental capacity to care about these little discoveries. He only wanted to dig a hole and bury himself in it. But since Qin Feng was speaking, he spared one-third of his energy to respond, "The dad created Cui Yue, put suggestion patterns all over him, but discarded him. And the son picked up where he left off."

"That's also my guess." Qin Feng nodded. "There's evidence on Cui Yue of numerous reconstructions by a nonprofessional, which is why he became so strange."

"Since when is Cui Yue strange?" Bai Shaonan shot a glare at Qin Feng. Even at this moment in time, he was still fiercely protective.

"Don't you think the ideas he comes up with are always baffling, to say the least?" Qin Feng gestured for Bai Shaonan to come look at a chart. He

pointed at a steady line on it and said, "These are reactions from your brain."

Then, he pointed at another line with so many loops and turns that it might as well have been the English alphabet and said, "This is Cui Yue's. No other ghost could've had a result like this. It's clear that a ghost has done some work on his brain."

Bai Shaonan's eye twitched at the squiggly line before him. He couldn't help saying, "What kind of work? Did they fill it with water?"

"Pretty much. To be honest, I can't understand what the son put in there, but I have a pretty good guess." Qin Feng glanced at Bai Shaonan. "Remember that mission at the end of last year, when you got chopped in half?"

"*Almost* chopped in half," Bai Shaonan corrected him, even as an absurd notion surfaced in his mind. He stared, wide-eyed as he cried out, "Motherfucker, that's impossible!"

"It's possible. The son didn't know how to activate Cui Yue, so he transplanted a part of you into him, transforming Cui Yue into a special entity that's practically your double. At the same time, to prevent your powerful abilities from showing up in Cui Yue, he 'poured some water in,' as you called it, effectively making Cui Yue a little weird." Qin Feng did not have a mother for Bai Shaonan to ask after, so he calmly ignored the other ghost's cussing. "That also explains why, as a narcissist, you would fall in love with a moron in such a short period of time. Simply put, what Cui Yue and you have is actually a case of 'self-cest.'"

Bai Shaonan found the self-cest idea a little hard to swallow, so he attempted to change the topic. "No wonder he was able to go to the casino hotel without us knowing."

"He knew to use the missions as an opportunity to obtain a part of your body. Combining that with recent events, it's obvious who the son is," said Qin Feng.

“I can’t believe Fu Zhaoyi really doesn’t have a crush on you.” Bai Shaonan sounded disappointed. There was no trace of grief on his face when he was engaging in gossip.

Qin Feng shot Bai Shaonan a cold look. That was the truth from the start, it was only Bai Shaonan who refused to accept it.

“But wait, why does he want Cui Yue to seduce me?” Bai Shaonan narrowed his eyes. Wouldn’t it be more efficient for Fu Zhaoyi to spend his energy on climbing to the top of the board?

“Maybe you’re fortunate enough to know his daddy?” Qin Feng wiggled his brows.

“Bullshit.” Bai Shaonan feigned puking. At the thought of Fu Zhaoyi whining and calling another ghost “daddy”—ahem—he only wanted to barf.

“Otherwise, there’s no point in getting close to you,” Qin Feng continued. “If he was planning on using this idiot to seduce you into giving up all of your responsibilities, wouldn’t it be more convenient to bring Cui Yue out as your rival?”

“No, think about it. I’ve always been flawless,” Bai Shaonan said earnestly. “If I neglected my duties because of Cui Yue, then I would no longer be flawless. At that point, it’ll be convenient for him whether he’s trying to get rid of me or prop Cui Yue up.”

“Like hell you’re flawless. Your feud with the board of directors is already your biggest flaw,” Qin Feng said.

“If one has lots of experience but a bad attitude and has also become obsessed with pleasure and disregards his missions, while the other one is obedient and easy to fool, which do you think the board would choose?” Bai Shaonan gazed toward Cui Yue, still fast asleep, and asked, “Could there be something in Cui Yue’s body that would make a ghost madly infatuated with him after sex?”

“That’s a fictional trope straight from an erotic novel,” said Qin Feng flatly. “Sorry, Cui Yue is all normal down *there*. Maybe you can try getting

fucked by him to see if the thing on the other side is normal?"

"… Can the suggestion to seduce me be removed first?"

"Based on his current condition, that was only a suggestion instead of a direct order. It's likely possible to verbally guide him into forgetting it for now, but for a complete removal, we still need his creator."

"I see. Keep this from the Judge's court for now. Even if the likelihood is zero, I don't want to give up on any chance to save Cui Yue."

"All right."

"I'll take Cui Yue back first. Where's that stench-removal bodywash?"

"You're going to help him shower?"

"No shit. Or maybe you want to do it? I'm telling you, Qin Feng, I won't give you the chance to take advantage of him. The only one who can take advantage of him is me."

"Here's the bodywash, now get out of here and go to work."

Cui Yue woke up to find himself in the infirmary on campus.

How did he suddenly get to school when he had just been at home?

He blinked in confusion and tried his best to search through his memories. He remembered Bai Shaonan sitting on the sofa, scolding him. And then he knelt like a puppy at Bai Shaonan's feet to beg for forgiveness, and then… and then… Apparently they made out? And then… then he couldn't remember anything.

Could it be that Bai Shaonan was not merely a jade spirit, but a thousand-year-old jade spirit soaked in wine that would make a ghost drunk upon touch?

That was the conclusion Cui Yue came to after much thought, and it made a lot of sense to him. Bai Shaonan must have gotten him drunk from kissing, and in his distress, brought him to the school infirmary because he didn't dare take Cui Yue to the hospital lest his secret identity be revealed.

And as for why he'd never gotten drunk off the kisses before—Cui Yue's brain cells were simply too limited to have thought of that just yet.

Sitting by the ghostling's bedside, Qin Feng saw that Cui Yue had woken up, and set down the documents in his hand to "explain" the situation to him. "The doctor said that you've been too tightly wound lately, so you went to sleep as soon as you relaxed."

Cui Yue felt an odd sense of discord at these words, but there was no reason for Qin Feng the Great to lie to him. It would seem then that he wasn't drunk off of kisses but was so nervous about being scolded that he fell asleep as soon as Bai Shaonan stopped?

Since Qin Feng said it was so, then it must be true.

"Are you feeling better, a-Yue? Do you want some water?" Cao Zhongnan's face popped out from behind Qin Feng. He was originally planning to go to the library but happened to run into Qin Feng on the way, so he latched on and followed the ghost here. After all, he was Cui Yue's classmate, so it was only natural that he was concerned and staunchly refused to leave the infirmary.

"Didn't I say that you're only allowed to quietly sit on the side and play with your phone?"

Qin Feng pushed away Cao Zhongnan, who insisted on squeezing in next to the bed. If it wasn't for the fact that he didn't want to preemptively alert the enemy, he would have already locked the suspicious Cao Zhongnan up instead of silently agreeing to keep him by his side so he could keep a close watch on him.

However, since he had willingly told Qin Feng about the connection between Professor Chen and Fu Zhaoyi, Qin Feng couldn't be sure if there was some internal strife on Fu Zhaoyi's end, or if Cao Zhongnan had an ulterior motive.

"Look, a-Yue, he's bullying meeee—" Since Qin Feng wouldn't let him get close to Cui Yue, Cao Zhongnan retreated to the foot of the bed and

pretended to cry, though his sobs were so startlingly fake that any ghost with ears could tell that he was joking.

Cui Yue let out a little smile. Looking at the glum-faced Qin Feng and the weepy-eyed Cao Zhongnan's phony tears, he knew at once that it was a lover's quarrel. Speaking of lovers, he belatedly realized that his own significant other was absent. "Where's Dean Bai?"

"He received a call for a job at the last minute," Qin Feng answered.

This was actually not a lie. Bai Shaonan had originally planned to keep watch until Cui Yue woke, but the board of directors suddenly sent him a last-minute mission, so the dean had to make a trip to the human realm with the intention of making quick work of the assignment.

Cui Yue knew what the "job" in Qin Feng's words meant, so he didn't pursue the matter. He shifted his gaze to the foot of the bed, where Cao Zhongnan was still pretending to cry. "Stop crying, Cao B, you're going to disturb the other ghosts."

"We're the only three ghosts here, there is no other ghost." Cao Zhongnan glared at Cui Yue.

"All right then, you're disturbing me," Cui Yue replied.

"You either go home, or scramble to the side to play with your phone." Qin Feng took the chance to add insult to injury.

"Who's playing with his phone? I'm looking at posts." Cao Zhongnan pouted unhappily.

"What posts?" Cui Yue was curious.

"Haha, nothing much. Just some nonsense ramblings from other ghosts," Cao Zhongnan segued unnaturally after swiftly glancing at Qin Feng.

Qin Feng sneered to himself. Having already noticed that something was off about Cao Zhongnan, he knew full well that the other ghost was trying to draw them in. Meanwhile, Cui Yue did not disappoint, as he asked, "What nonsense rambles?"

"Um, it's about those murders with the Fu family ghosts. Didn't they say that Doctor Bai had committed suicide out of guilt?" Cao Zhongnan quickly said. "I saw them say the reason the guards hadn't been able to solve the case is because Doctor Bai had created the Soul Dispersing Saber."

"Soul Dispersing Saber?"

"It's just something made up by overimaginative middle schoolers. In reality, there's no such thing as a saber that extinguishes your souls with a single stab." Qin Feng calmly spoke up to interrupt Cao Zhongnan's explanation. His eyes were cool as usual, but alarm bells were going off in his mind.

He knew that Cao Zhongnan had said those words not to Cui Yue, but to himself. Cao Zhongnan had been giving out numerous hints, prompting him to look into Fu Zhaoyi, which meant that… Cao Zhongnan wasn't working for Fu Zhaoyi?

But for some reason, Cao Zhongnan was incredibly familiar with Fu Zhaoyi's modus operandi but was trying to expose it.

Qin Feng's gaze darkened. In that case, there was only one possibility: Cao Zhongnan was a ghost sent by "daddy" to get rid of his son for knowing too much, and he was using Bai Shaonan's and Qin Feng's hands to do it.

Five hours later, Bai Shaonan arrived at Qin Feng's house dragging half of a broken arm behind him. To prevent an incident like Cui Yue's happening again, instead of picking up as many pieces as he could see, he did a thorough cleanse of the scene, bringing back every single part of him that had fallen off in the midst of battle.

Knowing his boss, Qin Feng had brought Cui Yue back to his own residence early in the morning. Cao Zhongnan had accomplished his goal, so naturally he didn't continue clinging to Qin Feng. Therefore, when Bai Shaonan returned, he found only Cui Yue fast asleep with Qin Feng nearby, drinking coffee and looking through information.

"I thought these were top-secret documents not to be brought outside of campus." Bai Shaonan saw the files on Qin Feng's desk as soon as he entered. Noticing the familiar layout of the forms, he immediately recognized them as the new enrollment information from the university.

"Yes, I didn't have time to look through these at school, so I brought them home," Qin Feng admitted it openly. "Don't worry, perhaps very soon he won't be our student anymore."

"Who?" With no regard for his absent arm, he tried to see which student the information belonged to. When he did, he glanced at Qin Feng in shock, and said hoarsely, "Cao B works for Fu Zhaoyi?"

Obviously, he had the same thought as Qin Feng.

Qin Feng examined Bai Shaonan's broken arm and took out his tools to start the repair. Meanwhile, he explained what had happened in the infirmary, along with his inferences.

"That certainly is possible." Bai Shaonan sat still as a statue, allowing Qin Feng to hack away at his arm. "My father was a strange one, it's possible that he would've created something like a Soul Dispersing Saber and be totally unaware that Fu Zhaoyi had stolen it."

"… That's not what I'm talking about."

"I know. The ghost behind Cao B wants to get rid of Fu Zhaoyi using us. But what can we do? We really are trying to get rid of Fu Zhaoyi, so let's have him use us for now, then we can catch the mastermind later." A murderous look flashed through Bai Shaonan's eyes. "Without the dad and son, there likely won't be any other ghosts who can cast suggestion on little hotpot again."

So we're back at "little hotpot" now? Qin Feng was quiet for a moment. "Even so, the Judge already knows about Cui Yue's constitution. They'd surely request that he get an annual physical exam just like you."

"Physical exams don't include checking for suggestion patterns," said Bai Shaonan. A manic spark entered his eyes. It wouldn't be easy to hide

something from Judge Yanluo, but Cui Yue was his boyfriend, and he couldn't stand by and watch as the ghostling was executed without anything to say about it.

"Then how will you explain Cui Yue's brain waves?" Qin Feng sighed. So Bai Shaonan had indeed arrived at this idea—to fool the Judge's court.

"Use mine, or make some alterations to it before submitting." Bai Shaonan gave Qin Feng a look and gritted his teeth. "I can't let Cui Yue die in front of my eyes."

"But what you're suggesting is no different than jumping to your death. Take care of the Fu Zhaoyi problem first, and we'll try to think of something else," Qin Feng said calmly. He knew that Bai Shaonan's love-addled brain would resort to doing anything, but what was even sadder was Qin Feng's determination to scour for a solution despite knowing there was no way forward.

Just as Bai Shaonan couldn't stand by to watch Cui Yue die, Qin Feng couldn't allow Bai Shaonan to court death.

Bai Shaonan chuckled. If there was any other way, would he really have to resort to lying to the Judge?

Of course he was aware it was a dead end, meant to fool no one but himself.

He knew full well. But so what?

Reason and emotion were never meant to be held in comparison. Not to mention, Cui Yue was a unique double of himself. Before feelings developed between them, there was already an indescribable bond that drew them to each other. Bai Shaonan believed that it wasn't a coincidence that he decided to take a walk that day. He must have sensed that Cui Yue was nearby, and before his consciousness could react, his body had acted for him.

"Come, I'm going to connect your arm now." Qin Feng had repaired the arm in silence. After applying a special glue to the wound, he popped it

back in. “Give it a try, I’ll adjust it again if there are any problems.”

“It’s fine. No problems.” Bai Shaonan waved his arm.

“My workmanship is definitely not as good as Bai Qinghe’s. If you break it a few more times, I’ll have to switch out your whole body.” Qin Feng started packing up his tools.

Bai Shaonan glanced at his reconnected arm and said nonchalantly, “It’s fine. I’ll just get some sandpaper for the joint…”

Bai Shaonan’s voice suddenly cut off, and hearing that, Qin Feng lifted his eyes. Bai Shaonan looked solemn, but flames danced within his eyes—flames so hot that they might burn him if he wasn’t careful.

“What’s wrong?”

“Qin Feng, there’s a part of me in Cui Yue, which means that he should have the abilities that I have as well, right?”

“In theory, yes.”

“Which is to say, if I can switch bodies at will, then Cui Yue can also switch his current body for a normal one?”

Now Qin Feng understood why Bai Shaonan was suddenly so excited. To guarantee prolonged combat ability, Bai Shaonan’s souls were not bound to his body that lived in the underworld. The same should be true for Cui Yue.

In other words, there was hope.

“In theory, yes.” Qin Feng didn’t want Bai Shaonan to get his hopes up. “But before that, Cui Yue has to understand who he is and use those limited brain cells of his to learn how to switch bodies. Right now, he’s under Fu Zhaoyi’s control, which means if we teach him, he’ll turn around and report to the old geezer. It’ll be meaningless.”

“In other words, we have to first exterminate the dad and son.” Bai Shaonan’s whole body was shaking. He’d experienced a roller coaster of emotions in such a short period of time, it was a wonder that he was able to stay composed enough to think. “No. As soon as they’re gone, the Judge’s

court will ask for the results of Cui Yue's physical exam. He wouldn't have the time to learn."

"Then we can only teach him while still keeping him in the dark. How do you usually do it?"

"First, perceive the separation between the body and the souls…" Bai Shaonan stroked his chin in thought. "There's a yoga club at Northern Hell Campus, right?"

"I think so." Qin Feng thought he knew what Bai Shaonan was thinking. "But let me remind you, yoga promotes the unification of body and soul, whereas Cui Yue has to learn about their separation."

"No, the more he pursues unification, the more he'll realize that his body and souls are separate in the first place. After that, it'll be easy to forgo the body." Bai Shaonan checked his phone. "They don't accept new members this month, but that's okay. I'll make a private donation to the yoga club and then stick the little hotpot in; they probably won't have any objections."

Qin Feng's eye twitched. It would most definitely be inappropriate for a dean to make only one donation to a single club in the university. Instead of donating money, he'd better think of a way to fool the students directly.

"All right then. What we have to do now is find the Soul Dispersing Saber in Fu Zhaoyi's house." An excited smirk danced on Bai Shaonan's lips. "What do you think of sneaking in?"

Qin Feng shot Bai Shaonan a cold look, and spat out a single syllable:

"No."

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Cui Yue had always slept through the day and only woken up when it got dark, but today, his bladder forced him up in the middle of the afternoon. With half-closed eyes, he floated out of bed in the familiar direction of the bathroom but instead found a wall. His groggy brain was forced to start turning. Several minutes later, he finally remembered that he was in Qin Feng the Great's house, and not Bai Shaonan's.

He expected himself to be so excited about visiting his idol's home for the first time that he wouldn't be able to sleep. Moreover, he thought that if he couldn't sleep, he could get up early and make breakfast for his hero. The sad reality was he fell fast asleep as soon as he touched the bed. Still regretful, Cui Yue made his way to the bathroom. Just as he was floating back to bed to continue sleeping, he suddenly heard Bai Shaonan's voice coming from the living room.

Cui Yue's eyes brightened. Was Bai Shaonan back?

Without thinking, Cui Yue turned and headed straight for the living room. He'd only just caused trouble yesterday, so naturally he had to continue placating his boyfriend to get on his good side.

"I told you it won't work." This was Qin Feng's resigned voice.

"What do you mean 'won't work'? Wanting my little hotpot to learn yoga is the only reason that matters!" This was Bai Shaonan's unrelenting voice.

When he heard his own name being discussed, Cui Yue paused so the two ghosts in the living room wouldn't notice him. At the same time, he was astonished. Bai Shaonan wanted him to learn yoga?

Out of nowhere?

"The dean of the university is putting pressure on a school club—what are the other ghosts going to think?"

"You know very well that I can't stand to wait any longer. The little hotpot has to start learning now. How about I get a fake identity from the black market as a wealthy ghost and use it to make the donation?"

Bewilderment flashed across Cui Yue's face. Bai Shaonan's unusual forcefulness surprised him. He didn't continue eavesdropping and went back to bed. As sleep washed over him, he pondered: what did it mean?

In Cui Yue's understanding, yoga was merely a kind of exercise that challenged the limits of one's flexibility, contorting the body in all sorts of poses. Meanwhile, his four limbs were impossibly stiff. He couldn't even dance, let alone do yoga.

Hold on… Yoga?

A light bulb went off in Cui Yue's mind. If yoga was meant to train the body's flexibility, could it mean that Bai Shaonan thought Cui Yue's body was too stiff?

Cui Yue blushed so hard that he had to hide his face in a pillow. If his boyfriend wanted him to become more flexible, the motive behind that was obvious.

No wonder Bai Shaonan said he couldn't "stand to wait any longer." Cui Yue burrowed into the covers in embarrassment. He was ashamed to think that sperm-for-brains ghost in the living room was his own boyfriend.

Cui Yue recalled that the head of the yoga club happened to be a PIGS student. For a ghost who worked two jobs and only received one salary, rather than letting the dean put up a false front and donate money he didn't

even have, Cui Yue thought it'd be better to plead the case personally without Bai Shaonan's involvement.

Sigh—Cui Yue lamented Bai Shaonan's total lack of financial literacy. Bai Shaonan was lucky to have such a considerate boyfriend as him, Cui Yue thought, giving himself a pat on the back, before drifting off to sleep again.

The moment Cui Yue floated away in what he thought was a discreet manner, the two ghosts in the living room stopped arguing. Bai Shaonan hovered nervously, going back and forth above the sofa. "Will this make the little hotpot want to learn yoga on his own?"

"Probably. There's a yoga club founder in their program. If Cui Yue moves fast, he'll have done something by tonight." Qin Feng gave Bai Shaonan a look. "After all, it's you who wants him to learn. With that extraordinary brain of his, he'd surely fill in the gap with a reason of his own."

As Qin Feng predicted, Cui Yue asked for a temporary break from his grounding to go back to campus for a visit. Qin Feng went right over his boss's head and approved the request immediately, infuriating Bai Shaonan. As soon as he got to school, Cui Yue found the president of the yoga club, and after lots of blushing mumbles on his part, the president enthusiastically agreed to let him join. At the same time, a new rumor started spreading around campus: "Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue's first night was so bad, Cui Yue took up yoga to win back Bai Shaonan's love."

When Bai Shaonan heard of the rumors, he glared at Qin Feng for a long time. He was convinced that his dear secretary had foreseen this development, which was probably why he proposed the fake argument in front of Cui Yue in the first place.

"This also aligns with Fu Zhaoyi's seduction suggestion. This way, he'll know the aftermath of that without asking Cui Yue about it," Qin Feng responded in a rare act of consolation.

Bai Shaonan had no choice but to swallow his complaints and quietly cancel the ghostly bodyguards he'd ordered for Cui Yue. The new plan was this: Cui Yue would stay in the dorms while Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng continued to take turns keeping watch. Since they didn't want the Judge's court to find out too much about Cui Yue's background, they had to put some distance between the two. Naturally, Bai Shaonan told Cui Yue that he was no longer grounded specifically because it was essential he learn yoga.

At the same time, to prevent Cui Yue from sneaking off campus again, Bai Shaonan insisted on installing GPS tracking on his phone. Cui Yue was not the least bit resistant to this and handed over his phone voluntarily.

In order to placate his angry boyfriend, Cui Yue had only been going from the office reception room to class to yoga and back for the past few days. He'd send Bai Shaonan a text before he left every evening and had been so submissive that Cao Zhongnan laughed at him, saying he was treating Bai Shaonan not like a boyfriend but like a nosy mom.

Cui Yue didn't refute that claim. He might be dense, but he wasn't a complete moron. Bai Shaonan clearly hadn't forgiven him for sneaking up to the human realm. He seemed fine on the surface, though he'd been distancing himself ever since. Bai Shaonan would still sleep with his arms around Cui Yue like a body pillow, but every day he would leave early and return late, allowing very few chances for them to see each other face-to-face. He also rarely responded to the messages Cui Yue sent him, even though he'd read them. Furthermore, when Cui Yue stayed up late in the morning to wait for Bai Shaonan's return, he would be met with a silent figure who headed off to sleep right away without a word.

Cui Yue knew—this was a cold war.

Even though, just the other day, Bai Shaonan had fought with Qin Feng over getting Cui Yue to learn yoga, he'd turned right around and given Cui Yue the silent treatment. It was the first time in Cui Yue's ghostly life that he marveled at just how fickle male ghosts could be.

At this point, he had no other choice but to devote himself to learning yoga in the silent hope that Bai Shaonan would eventually forgive him.

The dean was leafing through the new enrollment files for Cao Zhongnan's cohort of students when his phone suddenly vibrated. Unconsciously, he pulled it out to look at Cui Yue's most recent message. "Little hotpot said he's going to the library and will be back in two hours. Keep an eye on the time. If time's up and he's still not back, then make sure to go grab him."

Qin Feng watched Bai Shaonan go through the fluid motion without even a second of hesitation and realized that it'd already become a reflex for him. "So you're still stringing him along?" He arched his brow.

"What do you mean 'stringing him along'? I've been forced to put some distance between us in order to restrain myself." Bai Shaonan gave Qin Feng a glare. "It's not like you figured out why the little hotpot was trying to seduce me. What if I can't control myself one day?"

Cui Yue had been stealing glances at him every day with that vulnerable and pitiful face. Bai Shaonan wasn't so coldhearted that he could say no to a look like that, so his heart had long been turned to mush. Unfortunately for him, there was still the suggestion pattern on Cui Yue's body. With all that desire and no outlet, he had no choice but to feign aloofness.

Qin Feng scoffed out of habit but refused to comment on Bai Shaonan's trials, instead bringing the conversation back on track. "What's the deal with Cao Zhongnan's entrance interview—how come there was only one professor attending? Who approved it?"

"Prospective student interviews don't have to go through the dean. How should I know?" Bai Shaonan said, shirking responsibility. "Why don't you tell me what's up with the fact that the interviewer is Professor Chen himself?"

Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan exchanged a glance. Fu Zhaoyi's reach was apparently deeper than they thought. Details like these would often be overlooked, allowing some ghost to take advantage of the loophole.

"Check if we still have Cao Zhongnan's interview record." Bai Shaonan crossed his arms. "Though I expect they'll have already been deleted."

"I've brought back all the information the school has on Cao Zhongnan. If it's not in there, then it doesn't exist," Qin Feng answered. Even if Bai Shaonan hadn't yelled at him, he couldn't forgive himself for allowing this to happen under his watch. "I'll go to Judge Yanluo's court later to do more research on Cao Zhongnan."

"No. You're staying here to wait for the little hotpot. I have to go comb through my father's house. Didn't I tell you yesterday?"

"Right, I forgot. Tomorrow then."

"I'm going to the Fu headquarters tomorrow. Didn't I tell you the Fu family is finally allowing me to go through that pile of so-called classified documents from the Fu recruitment days? They only allowed it after I bugged them nonstop, and were pressured by the Judge."

"You didn't tell me."

"All right, I'm telling you now."

"What excuse did you use? Don't tell me you straight up said you want to investigate Fu Zhaoyi's past?"

"I said I want to write a biography about my father."

"It's a wonder they're letting you in with such a lame excuse."

"With the Judge on our side, they have no choice. Why else do you think I've been hovering around the Judge all day and night recently."

"He must've been real annoyed by you too, which is why he punted you over to the Fu headquarters."

"That's also a possibility. Never mind that, I have to go to my father's house now. I already arranged the time with the guards."

Qin Feng watched Bai Shaonan leave before returning his thoughts to Cao Zhongnan's files. His mood over the last few days was like a roller coaster going from heartache, to disappointment, to breakdown, to despair, and then cold composure, though his face still betrayed nothing through it all.

He thought he could afford to play along. He'd meant to treat Cao Zhongnan as one of the flings he used to meet regularly in the pubs. Little did he know that, in the end, he was the one being played.

Meanwhile, Bai Shaonan was too engrossed in his own problems to notice that his secretary was going through similar pains as himself.

With his heart set on Cui Yue, Bai Shaonan was convinced true love would conquer all. Bai Shaonan was even naive enough to think that Cao Zhongnan might cross over to their side for the sake of Qin Feng. However, Qin Feng knew that he and Cao Zhongnan were never romantically involved. When time was up, they'd return to their respective roles. Romeo and Juliet on the battlefield? That was always a fairy tale.

In real life, friends with benefits would never turn into true love.

Qin Feng cast his eyes down. He was better off going to the pub on occasion to relieve himself. He was done with one-on-ones.

Bai Shaonan came to Bai Qinghe's house feeling a complex mix of emotions. In a short period of time, he went through the suspicion that his father might be "Lovingly He," the subsequent announcement of his father's suicide, the revelation that his father really was "Lovingly He," and then the realization that his father was also a victim. And to top it all off was the knowledge about Cui Yue's origin. He now had no idea how to even tackle the matter of his late father.

Even so, he knew that he couldn't reveal even a hint of any of this in front of the ghostly guards. Under the watchful eyes of a guard and the guise of inspecting Bai Qinghe's belongings to help look for any tools related to the crimes, he flipped the place upside down, all the while

maintaining a blank expression. His search was comprehensive, not even sparing the garden.

In the ghostly guard's eyes, it seemed as though he were trying to find a nonexistent secret tunnel in the house. But Bai Shaonan knew exactly what he was looking for—the possibility that Bai Qinghe was developing the Soul Dispersing Saber. If he'd said the legendary saber was the weapon responsible for disappearing Fu Junzhan and Fu Wanli, the ghostly guard would never believe him and would probably even laugh at the absurdity.

In fact, if any other ghost told him something that sounded like a prop straight from a comic was actually the murder weapon, he would certainly smirk and mock them too. However, since Cao Zhongnan had specifically pointed out this tip, he had to take it seriously.

Bai Shaonan searched for a long time without any success, but he did manage to unearth many failed experiments from the past, which were all subsequently confiscated by the guard under the name of "evidence." He had no qualms about this, however, since they were all rubbish, and it made no difference to him if the guards decided to take them.

Before leaving, Bai Shaonan's eyes swept through the ransacked residence that was now reminiscent of a robbery scene. He thought to himself that he'd better plan for more time at the Fu headquarters tomorrow. Since he didn't have any luck here, there was more pressure to find any possible clue he could there.

As he came back to campus, Bai Shaonan's mind was overpowered by thoughts of Cui Yue and how the ghostling had been doing. When he heard Qin Feng say, "Cui Yue has been in your private bathroom for a whole hour and a half," he only felt more impatient as he rushed over, never noticing the odd expression on Qin Feng's face.

Bai Shaonan had imagined several scenarios before he barged into the bathroom, which included but was not limited to Cui Yue falling asleep in the bathtub, Cui Yue secretly doing something lewd, and Cui Yue sitting on

the toilet sobbing pathetically. What he hadn't expected to see as soon as he floated in was a little backside stuck high in the air and directly mooning the door.

Bai Shaonan gulped. If this was how Cui Yue planned to seduce him, he had to admit that it was much more effective than the direct verbal invitation from earlier.

Of course, it'd be even better if the seductive little butt was soft and fair, and not neon yellow like the one before him.

What had the little hotpot done to his butt? Had he colored it in himself?

"What are you doing?" Bai Shaonan coughed, trying to keep his voice from sounding husky. If he was perfectly honest, as long as it was the little hotpot's butt, he would be turned on regardless of whether it was neon yellow or neon green.

"Hm? I'm— AHHH when did you come in here!" Standing facedown and ass up in the bathtub, Cui Yue turned his head at the voice. Upon seeing Bai Shaonan's horrified expression that said, "What kind of bath are you taking?" and then realizing his own bizarre pose, he cried out in surprise before flipping around so that his bottom was no longer facing Bai Shaonan.

"I heard Qin Feng say that you've been in the bathroom for a long time, so I came in to check on you because I was worried." Bai Shaonan saw Cui Yue trying to cover up his mini-Cui Yue with his hands in vain, all the while red as a beet. Bai Shaonan sighed in relief. From the looks of it, the little hotpot hadn't been ordered to seduce him again.

"C-Can you go out first? I can explain." The beet wanted to cry but no tears would come. Cui Yue swore that he didn't usually shower like this. There was a reason why he was in this position today, and it'd just been his luck that Bai Shaonan had seen it.

A stark-naked Cui Yue standing in the bathtub giving him a pleading look was lethally tempting to Bai Shaonan. He wasn't sure what would

happen if he stayed.

All right, what else could happen other than some moaning and groaning followed by Qin Feng hunting him down?

Bai Shaonan was very impressed that he was able to think that far, given the circumstances. At the thought of Qin Feng's grim face, all the hot blood coursing down to his lower body abruptly cooled. He shifted his gaze away, not daring to look at the beautiful sight before him, and sheepishly said, "I'll give you forty-five minutes," before fleeing the room.

Cui Yue's stiffened body finally relaxed after realizing that Bai Shaonan was letting him off the hook. Then he remembered Bai Shaonan's gaze and how the other ghost had looked as though he was ready to swallow him whole. He couldn't help but shiver a little, and his pale skin immediately turned red again.

Cui Yue looked down at his round toes. Even though he wasn't wearing any clothes, Bai Shaonan had held back from pouncing on him. Could it be his boyfriend really hadn't… forgiven him?

In earlier times, Bai Shaonan would surely have pulled Cui Yue into his arms, and even if they didn't do anything else, he would have at least tried to get in as many kisses as he possibly could. A small amount of Cui Yue's relief at having escaped suddenly gave way to an indescribable sadness. He sighed, then went back to washing his hindquarters in resignation.

Bai Shaonan came out of the bathroom and sat down on the couch, counting on his fingers the days since the little hotpot had started learning yoga. It hadn't been very long, and Cui Yue hadn't even passed the beginner stage; there was a long way to go before he could recognize the separation between the body and souls. If his next target was a monk or something, Bai Shaonan thought to himself, he could take some time to discuss abstinence strategies with them.

As of right now, Bai Shaonan didn't even dare to kiss Cui Yue, afraid that he would fail to stop his own body from going further, and then too far. Before, the little hotpot had used the unapproved request as an excuse for his adamant refusal. Now, because of the suggestion pattern, Cui Yue would not only stop refusing, he would even cooperate. Faced with the little hotpot's change in attitude, it was the first time in Bai Shaonan's life that he chose the agonizing path of repressing his natural male urges.

Perhaps he could sneak off to the bathroom for a quick relief after Cui Yue was asleep? Bai Shaonan peered at his recently animated but now waning lower body—never mind, he wasn't in the mood anymore.

Now clothed, Cui Yue slowly made his way out of the bathroom thirty minutes later. During that time, Bai Shaonan went through the terrible, heart-wrenching despair of reading two whole folders of documents, or what was more commonly known as "overtime." Just as he reached an important section, his eyes caught a glimpse of Cui Yue. He had to put the file down and said, "You're done?"

"I don't do that normally. It's because… because my underwear… is bleeding dye, and the color got on my… on there, so just now I was washing…" Cui Yue launched into his explanation as soon as he came out. He was unduly nervous and failed to even notice that Bai Shaonan was in the middle of work.

"Okay, got it… What?" All of Bai Shaonan's attention was on the documents, and Cui Yue's words practically went in one ear and out the other. However, just as the words "neon underwear bleeding dye onto butt" were about to exit his right ear, he plopped his laptop down and stared at Cui Yue, the bewilderment only now showing on his face.

Indeed, the butt he had witnessed in the bathroom had been neon yellow. But what kind of underwear could color an entire rear end like that?

"Yes, the underwear bleeds color. Also, the shower head in the bathroom is fixed to the wall. I couldn't bring it down, so I had to… stick it

up like that to wash…" Cui Yue said quietly.

"… Didn't Qin Feng buy you some clothes a while ago? Was that where the underwear came from?" asked Bai Shaonan. He couldn't believe that Qin Feng would buy such low-quality unmentionables for his little hotpot.

"No, the ones Qin Feng bought looked too childish, so I asked Cao B to get me some normal-looking ones. I didn't expect the human to burn a whole neon series down here," Cui Yue said, the misery evident in his voice. He figured Bai Shaonan wouldn't want anything to do with him for at least a few days, so in order to not "waste" the underwear, he'd decided to wear all the neon colors in that time. He didn't expect this to happen.

"Don't wear those anymore. I'll get you new ones with better material." Bai Shaonan sighed. He thought Cui Yue was learning body painting or something, but… it seemed anything was possible with the little hotpot.

Noticing that Bai Shaonan's expression remained neutral and he seemed willing to talk, Cui Yue couldn't help but press on, "Does this mean you're not mad at me anymore?"

"What do you think?" Bai Shaonan let out a pretentious *humph*.

"I won't do it again. Please forgive me," said Cui Yue, bowing his head.

Bai Shaonan also couldn't bear to see Cui Yue like this. However, no matter how much the dean pitied him, he never missed taking advantage of a situation. "Then you better learn some yoga. Then we'll talk."

The pervert dared to turn the situation to his benefit! Cui Yue puffed up his cheeks and glared at Bai Shaonan. He knew that impure motives were behind the compulsory yoga lessons!

Bai Shaonan patted Cui Yue's head and said with an air of nonchalance, "Don't just focus on twisting your arms and legs, one of the objectives of yoga is to be at one with your body and mind."

He barely skimmed the surface with this tip since he didn't dare go into too much detail. The only hope he had was that Cui Yue would understand his "hint" and make an attempt on his own.

What a faker! Naturally, Cui Yue not only misinterpreted Bai Shaonan's clue, but also cursed the dean out in his mind.

"Oh, yeah, do you know your score from when you snuck up to the human realm?" Bai Shaonan was about to return his computer back to its rightful place, but as soon as he stood up, he remembered something very important. He hadn't yet asked Cui Yue himself about his excursion. Even if the ghostling didn't remember someone giving him the "suggestion," Bai Shaonan wondered what he *did* recall.

"The professor didn't say, but I must've failed for sure since the unit was empty when I went," Cui Yue said cautiously, and after seeing that Bai Shaonan wasn't becoming upset again, he finally briefly explained what happened that day.

Just as expected, the little hotpot didn't have any memory of being influenced by a suggestion. Bai Shaonan thought about it for a moment. The unit was empty precisely because an old geezer named Fu had laid a trap for Cui Yue inside.

"I know. It's all right. You're pretty much locked into last place anyway, so it'd be no surprise if you're held back." Bai Shaonan comforted him.

"I won't be! I'll put in the work!"

The evening of the next day, Bai Shaonan arrived at the Fu family headquarters located within the Judge's court. Officially, it was known as the main location of Fu Lai Incorporated, but all the ghosts in the underworld treated the high-rise office building as the Fu family's central command.

The security guard had long been waiting at the door for the ghost to show up. The guard first frisked Bai Shaonan for photography equipment before leading him into the building.

"Dean Bai, everything in here is confidential. Reproduction through photos, videos, or handwritten notes is forbidden, as is removing anything

from this place. We will search you again when you come out," the security guard reminded Bai Shaonan of the rules as he collected the dean's phone.

"Sure, no problem," said Bai Shaonan as he pushed open the front doors leading to the legendary bureau of secrets. The Fus had put a lot of effort into this door in order to prevent other ghosts from barging in. Even as spirits, they still had to physically open it to get inside—crossing wouldn't work here.

Bai Shaonan used to think that the bureau of secrets was an immense room that lay beyond that front door, with rows upon rows of metal shelves and all manner of yellowing documents. Paired with some sepia-toned lights, it would be like a horror movie set perpetually under threat of an axe-murderer jump scare at any moment. To his surprise, it looked completely different from his imagination. The room was small—about the same size as his office—and beneath the dim lights were only one desk, one computer, and a cabinet taller than him filled with USB drives engraved according to year.

So this was the digital age? Bai Shaonan arched his brows and peered up at the concealed camera on the ceiling. A smirk surfaced on his face. Did the Fu family think this setup would be enough to intercept and find out what he was really looking for?

With a flourish of his hand, Bai Shaonan summoned a wind blade, letting the gale slash at the white walls around him until it quickly revealed a hollow in the wall. A flying kick was enough to cave in the hidden door that actually led to the bureau of secrets and to destroy various talismans in the process, allowing Bai Shaonan to make his way inside unobstructed.

Not everyone could be a garbage-disposal tool. Otherwise, with his rotten attitude and exclusive targeting of the Fu ghosts, how could the board stand to keep him around?

Bai Shaonan cackled to the air for a minute. The security guard certainly wouldn't sit around after his act of vandalism. He needed to find

the documents before the other ghosts arrived. With this in mind, he shifted the untouched cabinet in front of the door as a roadblock before floating in through the hidden entrance.

After going down several flights of stairs, Bai Shaonan finally arrived at the actual bureau of secrets. Here, boxes were arranged in rows of five each, organized neatly by year. His eyelids twitched violently at the sight. This arrangement bore an uncanny resemblance to columbariums—or perhaps the Fus were into that look?

He quickly located the box from the year Fu Zhaoyi had been brought into the Fu family. Only after opening it did he see how messy it was inside, with all the paperwork from that year thrown in haphazardly in no particular order. After getting a firsthand look of the abominable interior that betrayed the information center's glamorous facade, Bai Shaonan resigned himself to look through everything, attempting to retrieve some useful information within the limited timeframe.

Just as the rumors claimed, Fu Zhaoyi really was a last-minute addition. The best evidence was the lack of a review report on his candidacy despite the existence of a photocopy of his name-change notice. However, the notice didn't contain his original name. Bai Shaonan flipped through the records from the year before and after but still didn't find anything of note. Refusing to give up, he circled the room again, checking to see if there were any other boxes from the same year stored in another location.

The answer was no.

However, there were five boxes labeled "Unsorted."

Bai Shaonan sighed and resumed his search. Fortunately, when he reached the third box, he found a dust-covered folder at the very bottom that blended into the color of the cardboard. The outside was unlabeled, and if not for his sharp eyes, he would have missed it.

The folder was very thin, with no more than three pages inside. However, those pages were filled top to bottom with notes and design

sketches. As Bai Shaonan read through them intently, fervor flashed in his eyes as though he wanted to swallow the pages whole.

Apparently, someone *had* come up with a weapon similar to a Soul Dispersing Saber and had even submitted a blueprint to the Fu family. Furthermore, at least on paper, it seemed viable. Bai Shaonan found the author's name at the very bottom of the last page—a name he'd never heard of before.

Nan Jin.

Who was Nan Jin? No idea.

In his mind, Bai Shaonan swiftly filtered through the list of names of ghosts who had exchanged ideas with Bai Qinghe about bizarre experiments. He couldn't even recall a ghost with the surname Nan among them.

Most ghosts able to hold a conversation with Bai Qinghe had to be researchers of a certain caliber and repute. In other words, this Nan Jin was either a hermit who resided deep in the mountains, or an average nobody.

Could it be that Fu Zhaoyi's original name was Nan Jin? Bai Shaonan still harbored some doubt about this theory, but when he recalled Cao B's name, suddenly everything seemed to make sense.

Zhongnan… If he took the meaning of "zhong" as in "to end" literally, wasn't the name "Zhongnan" covertly implying "end the one with the surname Nan"?

But hold on, Bai Shaonan's name also contained the character "nan." Could Cao B be trying to end him as well?

In that case, Cao Zhongnan might be a fake name, Bai Shaonan thought as he returned the file back to its place. He closed the box and moved to hover in front of the files from the year Bai Qinghe was recruited by the Fu family, and pretended to study one of the folders he randomly pulled out.

Hearing noise coming from the stairs, he knew that the security guards were about to come look for him. He couldn't let them see him investigating any ghost other than Bai Qinghe.

The security guard's head soon poked out from the doorway and was followed by several managerial-level executives. They all fumed upon seeing Bai Shaonan's unhurried poise.

Everyone knew that the biography for Bai Qinghe was only a pretense. The head of the Fu family had promised in front of the Judge to allow Bai Shaonan access but turned around and ordered his staff to use their means to find out Bai Shaonan's actual target of investigation. However, the security mechanism at the bureau of secrets was renowned, so they couldn't trick Bai Shaonan with any old room. After painstakingly digitizing all the information in the archive, they set up a small room outside the door especially for him. They didn't expect Bai Shaonan to not only see right through the facade but to destroy all their hard work as well.

They'd doubly failed this time.

"It took you twenty minutes to get in here. Seems like your headquarters isn't very efficient." Bai Shaonan had no intention of arguing with these ghosts who were pushed to the forefront to bear the brunt of the blame, so he decided to strike first and hit them where it hurt.

"Bai Shaonan—" one of the executives was about to speak up and reprimand the intruder, but hearing their own folly pointed out so clearly shut him up. He could only glare furiously at Bai Shaonan as the latter took his time putting the files away.

"The Judge's court just called for me. You guys came just in time to see that I'm not taking anything outside. Hey, guard, come check me." Bai Shaonan came up with a boldfaced lie to explain why he was only there for all of twenty minutes after going through the trouble of parading out the Judge to gain entry.

The security guard looked at the livid manager, then at the serene Bai Shaonan, and finally received a nod of approval from the former to quickly step up and conduct a thorough search. Then, the ghosts watched as Bai

Shaonan drifted out of the building and right into Judge Yanluo's court nearby.

Bai Shaonan traveled freely through Judge Yanluo's court, where he had unrestricted access to most areas and could entirely escape the ghostly guards' notice. Because of this special privilege, he was able to easily find out everything there was to know about Cao Zhongnan.

"There's no record of Cao Zhongnan at Judge Yanluo's court, same as the little hotpot. Don't tell me he's the third one?" Since Cui Yue was off learning yoga, Bai Shaonan was able to sit down once more in his office chair and tell Qin Feng about his findings of the day.

"He's definitely a ghost." Qin Feng was certain. "How did it go at the headquarters?"

"I found it. A ghost named 'Nan Jin' submitted the design for a Soul Dispersing Saber to the Fu family; there's even two versions of it. The blade doesn't look like what you'd think. It's more like a craft knife."

"A craft knife?" Qin Feng frowned. The idea even sounded absurd.

"Yes. Nan Jin took inspiration from the blades of craft knives and proposed the concept of siphoning ghostly energy, then sealing it within the used blades to dispose of after killing the ghost," Bai Shaonan explained. To make sure Qin Feng understood, he even used his artistic skills to draw a few diagrams—unfortunately, his expertise only qualified him for matchstick figures.

"Is it the same size as a typical craft knife?"

"Unfortunately, it'd be similar. It's a little larger and thicker than normal craft knives, but generally speaking it shouldn't be longer than a forearm."

"Which means Fu Zhaoyi can carry it with him."

"Yes."

"And we may not find anything even if we search his home."

"Didn't you shoot down that idea earlier? Now you're bringing it up as if it was possible?"

"Let's set this aside for now. First, we need to notify the guards and tell them to arrest Cao Zhongnan. The forged identity alone is enough to mobilize them."

"You're serious, Qin Feng?" Bai Shaonan said, now dumbstruck. The sudden change of topic caught him off guard.

He welcomed Qin Feng's gesture of placing justice above personal relations, but whether the secretary would be able to bear the emotional aftermath was another thing entirely. He didn't want Cao Zhongnan to rot in jail if it meant Qin Feng would rot away in melancholy.

"I'm serious. I've thought it through." Qin Feng's expression was as composed as ever, and his tone even, no different than when he was urging Bai Shaonan to put a signature on a document. Only the brief flash of a bitter smile at the corner of his lips betrayed his true feelings. "While they're at it, they can deal with Professor Chen and the admissions office too, and see who had the gall to let Cao Zhongnan in."

Bai Shaonan was quiet for a moment. Though Qin Feng had been made from grass, he knew the ghost's temperament was more like a grass-devouring ox. Whatever Qin Feng had decided on, he would never change his mind. Since he'd come out and said all this, it meant that he wouldn't go back on his word.

"If you're sure, then we'll do as you say."

Qin Feng confirmed some more details with Bai Shaonan, who rounded out the plan before calling Ghostly Guard Junior to make an arrest.

Ghostly Guard Junior was utterly bewildered when he received this call. He had heard of the name Cao Zhongnan and only knew him as Cui Yue's good buddy. And now, Bai Shaonan wanted him to get a warrant for his arrest, and was telling him to make as big a scene of it as possible to make sure that everyone knew.

Bai Shaonan had gone a little nuts out of denial of Bai Qinghe's crimes, the guard initially thought. However, after hearing more of the story, his face gradually turned grim. By the end of it, he promised that he would go over immediately.

It wasn't until the guard arrived at the Northern Hell Campus with his underlings in tow that he belatedly realized something was off. In theory, this was a school scandal at the very least. As the dean, Bai Shaonan should have requested them to keep a low profile but on the contrary, he ordered them to cause an attention-grabbing ruckus. What was he trying to do?

He knew it. Bai Shaonan had gone off the rails.

When Cui Yue returned to the reception room from his yoga session, he saw several ghostly guards hovering around talking to Bai Shaonan. He directed his gaze at Qin Feng and asked quietly, "Are they discussing Bai Qinghe's case?"

"No, it's something else." Qin Feng didn't explain, only gesturing grumpily for Cui Yue to look at the sofa. "That idiot said the sofa is where he and you sleep, and forbade the guards from sitting down on it."

Cui Yue felt a tiny bit of delight creep into his heart as an involuntary little smile also crept onto his face. He was about to giggle out loud as the ghostly guards filed out one by one, but Bai Shaonan called him in from where he was leaning against the doorway.

"You're back, little hotpot?"

"Yeah."

"Try not to go anywhere for the next few days, and avoid talking to other ghosts—even your classmates." Bai Shaonan tousled Cui Yue's hair as he placed all the blame on the guards. "Your good buddy Cao B is a bad ghost. The guards just came and said they're going to arrest him."

"What?" Cui Yue's jaw dropped to the floor in shock. He hurried to ask, "What's wrong with Cao B?"

“Cao B forged his identity. There’s never been a ghost by the name of Cao Zhongnan in the underworld.” Bai Shaonan kindly replaced Cui Yue’s jaw back into position and took the chance to run his hands all over Cui Yue’s face. After all, Qin Feng was right outside and would come in and stop him if anything got out of hand.

“Why would Cao B do that?” Cui Yue’s whole focus was on the matter at hand. He didn’t notice Bai Shaonan’s errant hands.

“He’s being arrested because they don’t know why he would do something like that. Don’t worry, I’ve already notified the guards to not announce the reason for his arrest just yet. You should keep quiet for the next few days in case reporters or other students try to wheedle information out of you,” Bai Shaonan continued. Innocent as he was, Cui Yue automatically accepted that Bai Shaonan was trying to protect Cao Zhongnan’s reputation. He didn’t think that conducting an arrest without explicitly stating a reason would only invite rumors and blow the ordeal further out of proportion.

Cui Yue nodded, but he couldn’t help but feel depressed after learning a friend who’d always been nice and accommodating of him was actually a bad ghost. Seeing the ghostling so crestfallen made Bai Shaonan’s heart clench. He’d only mentioned the tip of the iceberg. If he continued and exposed the rest of the dirt, Cui Yue would only be left even more shaken.

Bai Shaonan pondered for a moment, and at last could only pat Cui Yue’s shoulder as he told him an impossible lie, “Don’t be sad. Maybe he’ll be fine.”

According to Qin Feng’s report, Cao Zhongnan stayed in the dorm room most of the time when he wasn’t in class or in the cafeteria. On days with no class, he could stay in bed for a whole day. The ghostly guards confirmed that their target didn’t have class that day before arriving outside the dorms. They called out Cao Zhongnan’s name a few times outside the

door. Receiving no response and suspecting something was amiss, they floated directly inside only to find nothing there.

The guards backed out and checked the room number to make sure they weren't mistaken. Finally, they realized that the situation wasn't as simple as they thought.

Not only was Cao Zhongnan gone, all his things had disappeared too. The room was so empty it was as if no ghost had ever lived there. He had somehow obtained news of his exposed identity and had even taken the time to strip his room bare before running away, as though mocking the too-late guards with its emptiness.

Recalling the recent unsolved cases, the guard was reminded of Bai Shaonan's earlier warning: *Cao Zhongnan's background might be a lot more complicated than you imagined.* At that moment, an idea sprang to his mind. Did Bai Shaonan suspect that Cao Zhongnan was connected to Bai Qinghe?

No, did he think Cao Zhongnan was Bai Qinghe's accomplice?

"Go back and apply for a wanted order on Cao Zhongnan! And check the entry and exit records at Bai Qinghe's house. Check older records too. Start looking from three months before Fu Wanli's death!

That morning, when Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue were already on the sofa about to sleep, the phone rang and Bai Shaonan floated out of the reception room before answering. Cui Yue glanced at the clock on the wall. If any ghost was calling at this hour, it had to be important, so he snuck outside and pricked up his ears to listen.

Bai Shaonan's back was to him. Cui Yue looked left and right for a hiding place but failed to find one, so he retreated into the reception room and left only his little head in the doorway to eavesdrop.

When he heard the news of Cao Zhongnan's escape, it came as a shock.

"Cao B ran away?" Cui Yue cried out automatically.

Bai Shaonan knew immediately what was happening when he heard the brief cry from behind him. He sighed and ended the call before turning to confront a certain ghost's panic-stricken face.

"Little hotpot, eavesdropping is a bad habit to develop." Bai Shaonan was not mad, instead gesturing for Cui Yue to follow him back into the reception room.

"Sorry… I'm a little worried about Cao B. He's the first classmate who was friendly to me after I enrolled. He was always so good to me. I can't imagine that he would do this." Cui Yue saw that Bai Shaonan wasn't angry and mustered up further courage. "Could it be a misunderstanding?"

"Cao B did something to the room before he ran away. He fooled the ghostly guards, so they're not going to let him get away with it." Bai Shaonan didn't go into details about what exactly Cao Zhongnan had done. He pinched Cui Yue's cheeks and said, "You're too quick to talk, so I can't tell you more."

"No, I'm not!" Cui Yue puffed up his cheeks in protest. It was bad enough that his boyfriend wasn't on his side, but even worse, he was mocking him.

"Right, of course. All right then. Let's get to sleep." Bai Shaonan didn't mind Cui Yue's protests as he yawned, lay down, and went back to sleep.

Cui Yue opened his eyes wide and stared. He couldn't believe that Bai Shaonan had abandoned him and gone to sleep on his own. However, after a while of staring and realizing that Bai Shaonan truly wasn't planning to respond, he had no choice but to also lie down. Reluctantly, he excavated a comfortable spot for himself in Bai Shaonan's arms and went to sleep.

"Goodnight, little hotpot."

"Hmph. Goodnight."

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Cui Yue didn't go to class that evening.

If Bai Shaonan told him to stay away from class for the sake of avoiding the rumors going around, Cui Yue would surely object to such trivial things getting in the way of his academic ambitions. However, since it was Qin Feng who spoke to him, he instantly agreed without a second thought. This caused Bai Shaonan to fume so hard that he wanted to bite a handkerchief.

"What are they saying out there?" Cui Yue asked as he ate the dinner Qin Feng had bought him.

"Depends on which version you want to hear." Qin Feng glanced at Bai Shaonan, who was having trouble finding a handkerchief. He smiled mockingly before pulling out an unused one and handing it over, indicating to his boss to please begin the act.

"Version?" Cui Yue asked, as though nothing else were going on. It wasn't that he didn't see Bai Shaonan's reaction, but compared to Cao Zhongnan's case and his own stomach, his boyfriend's childish antics could temporarily be set aside.

"Yes. For now, there are three main ones: The first is that Cao B is actually the secret son of a professor. The second is that he's an undercover agent sent by the main campus to spy on the dean to make sure he's actually working and, after being found out, was forced to go on the run when Bai Shaonan retaliated and main campus wouldn't claim him. The third is a

dramatic Bai/Cui/Cao story of love and hate in which Bai Shaonan discovered that you cheated with Cao B, who ran away out of fear of retaliation." Qin Feng wasn't surprised at Cui Yue's dropped jaw. After all, there was no happy ending between two bottoms.

"Do the ghosts in our school have a little… too much time on their hands?" It took Cui Yue a while to find his voice again. Him and Cao B? How was that possible?

Besides, didn't Cao Zhongnan have his sights locked on Qin Feng the Great…? At this thought, Cui Yue's eyes drifted surreptitiously toward Qin Feng. However, when he saw the other ghost's frosty expression, he knew to keep the forbidden question to himself. Otherwise, even Bai Shaonan couldn't save him.

"They've always had too much time on their hands." Qin Feng remembered a certain ghost who was so bored that he started writing slash fiction, and his heart seized in pain. The frost on his face instantly became even colder.

"Don't go outside today, little hotpot. If there's anything you need, just tell Qin Feng to do it for you." Since he'd failed to garner the attention of either ghost, Bai Shaonan quietly put the handkerchief down and acted as though he'd been part of the discussion all along.

"You're going out again? Where are you going?" Cui Yue blinked. Bai Shaonan had been away from campus for the last few days. It surprised him that he was even present for dinner.

"The ghostly guards needed me for something." Bai Shaonan was being vague, but Cui Yue knew that it must be related to Cao Zhongnan.

After dinner, Cui Yue returned dutifully to the reception room to do the assigned reading for his next lecture. To prevent him from slipping away under Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng's watch, boundaries were set up on every wall of the reception room, leaving only the door as a point of entry and exit.

"Your boyfriend really is stupid," Qin Feng said quietly to Bai Shaonan as he glanced at said door.

Unable to object, Bai Shaonan took in a deep breath and, stubbornly siding with his lover till the end, whispered, "Someone put an implant in his brain. It's not his fault."

Qin Feng gave Bai Shaonan a look that said, "*If he came from you, the apple clearly didn't fall far from the tree.*"

Bai Shaonan didn't answer, instead giving the reception room a troubled look. He knew of the blind reverence PIGS students held for Qin Feng, so he used that to his advantage to keep Cui Yue close and to stop him from overthinking.

It had been effective—Cui Yue hadn't hesitated to agree to the confinement. The academic achievements of the students at Northern Hell Campus were not as exceptional as the students at the main campus, but their powers of gossip and imagination were unparalleled. It only took a few days of Cui Yue being noticeably absent around campus for the rumors of a Bai-Cui-Cao love triangle like the one Qin Feng had mentioned to become more than just a rumor. There was even secret intel going around that he'd been locked up in a room by Bai Shaonan.

"Remember to let them know that the little hotpot is still on campus," Bai Shaonan reminded Qin Feng and couldn't help adding, "Which idiot was it who said he cheated?"

"How should I know? I was only responsible for leaking the love-triangle rumor," Qin Feng answered brusquely. Since their newly orchestrated plotline was immensely helpful to their cause, he decided to let it take a life of its own instead of correcting any inaccuracies.

Bai Shaonan pursed his lips unhappily. Now that the trap was set, all they had to do was wait for Fu Zhaoyi to jump in.

Naturally, Cui Yue never imagined that most of the rumors Qin Feng had just mentioned originated from his highly regarded Qin Feng the Great

himself.

Ever faithful, Cui Yue naively skipped class for several days and, with his newfound free time, devoted all his energy into yoga. Rarely did he go online to look at the rumors relating to himself. So, with the aid of Qin Feng's ambiguous silence, in less than three days the rumor that Bai Shaonan had locked Cui Yue up grew at an exponential rate. Meanwhile, one of the main players involved in the story, Bai Shaonan, traveled back and forth between the Judge's court and Northern Hell Campus all day long wearing his most peeved expression. As a result, any reporters who spotted him didn't dare to go up and ask him questions, choosing only to infer from afar.

Bai Shaonan's visible agitation that remained unchanged from one day to the next further cemented the theory that the cuckolded dean was keeping Cui Yue locked away for some non-con play. On the fifth day of the intrigue that held the entire underworld's rapt attention, one ghost claimed to have seen the missing Cui Yue in the window of the dean's office with Cao Zhongnan, who was currently wanted throughout hell. Suddenly, every ghost's blood boiled from excitement to the point of almost flowing through their vessels again.

If it wasn't for the security guards on campus sticking to their stations, hordes of idle gossip seekers would have crowded outside the dean's office window trying to get a peek.

"Cui Yue's just sick. What imprisonment? Stop listening to the nonsense from those reporters." Bai Shaonan hadn't checked in with the ghostly guards that day and instead sat in his office with one leg over the other on a video conference with the board of directors.

One of the directors on the screen moved his lips, and Bai Shaonan scoffed in reply, "He definitely has a doctor's note. Didn't you guys know that Qin Feng is a licensed physician?"

The Fu ghosts on his screen were slightly dismayed at this information. It was the first time they'd heard about Qin Feng having a medical license. More importantly, would the loyal Qin Feng use sickness as an excuse to keep Cui Yue locked up under Bai Shaonan's orders?

Bai Shaonan's gaze settled nonchalantly on the bottom-left corner of the screen. Fu Zhaoyi's face was stiff and unyielding. Miraculously, he had not said a single word throughout the entire meeting.

"Don't worry, Cui Yue will be fine very soon. I'll show you the note from the doctor later to settle your concerns. I am the dean, after all. How could I imprison one of my own students?" Since the directors were going in circles with the same old rhetoric, Bai Shaonan decided to ignore them and log off.

"What's wrong with Fu Zhaoyi?" Qin Feng came in with coffee just as Bai Shaonan removed his earpiece.

"With all the rumors going around, he must've believed it too." Bai Shaonan took a mug and suddenly remembered something. "Oh, yeah, the guard told me this morning that four months before Fu Wanli died, Cao B visited my father's residence multiple times. It was all caught on surveillance."

Qin Feng frowned. "Didn't I tell you a couple days ago that they were in it together? How else do you think Cui Yue could be activated with your parts? Bai Qinghe secretly increased the difficulty of your targets so you'd be chopped to pieces while Cao B waited on the sidelines to pick up the leftovers. That way your father could take care of your severe injuries and get some bonding time too."

"You never said that. Also, please don't use 'leftovers' to refer to my body parts." Bai Shaonan gave him an irreproachable look.

"Well, now you've heard it from me, leftovers," Qin Feng said coolly.

Bai Shaonan, who was partially "leftover" only a minute ago, had no comeback to that.

The next evening, Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng had plans to go for a visit to the Judge's court, while Cui Yue was to stay on campus by himself. He assured them that he'd be just fine and that he was so comfortable in the reception room that it felt like home.

Cui Yue's plan that day was to finish his essay. However, as he worked, he suddenly felt a draft from behind him. His typing hands immediately stiffened as he realized that a ghost was hovering over his shoulder. He knew neither Bai Shaonan nor Qin Feng would ever hover behind him without making any sound.

The dean had once warned him not to sit with his back to the door but he'd been too lazy to move the furniture. A flash of panic crossed Cui Yue's eyes. On the surface, he continued typing and pretended to be oblivious while his eyes darted around in an attempt to find a weapon to defend himself. He had the choice of a half-finished bottle of water, an expensive laptop, a wireless mouse, or a small cellphone.

Cui Yue reached out surreptitiously for the mouse. He might have promised Qin Feng to never leave the room, but since danger had come looking, there was no reason to stay here and give up on his life. He took a deep breath. Just as he was about to turn and throw the mouse as a diversion before running out of the reception room, the ghost behind him finally spoke up, "What are you going to do to your creator? Stop that." The cold voice carried an almost imperceptible note of exasperation.

Cui Yue stilled. The figure reflected clearly in his eyes. The visitor was not a reporter or some gossipy student but none other than the director on the board of Northern Hell Campus, Fu Zhaoyi.

"Put the mouse down."

With this order, Cui Yue immediately relaxed the hand that held the mouse, which clattered to the floor. He didn't even look at it as he continued staring at the visitor, his eyes dead and turning hollower with each passing second.

"Where is Cao Zhongnan?" Fu Zhaoyi asked right off the bat. He had made his way here while Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng were gone for only two reasons—to find out how Cui Yue was doing and to learn Cao Zhongnan's whereabouts.

"He's missing," Cui Yue answered blankly. Bai Shaonan had only told him that Cao Zhongnan disappeared, and that was all he knew.

"Isn't Cao Zhongnan's disappearance part of Bai Shaonan's plan?" Fu Zhaoyi continued. He had patiently waited all these days only because he assumed the charade was a trap laid by Bai Shaonan in connection to Bai Qinghe's death. Though the goal of the setup was unclear and he wasn't one to take heed of anything he deemed irrelevant to himself, the rumors had only grown in absurdity, and Bai Shaonan's silent acknowledgment had started to make him wonder how much of it was true.

"No."

"How did the ghostly guards think to look into Cao Zhongnan?"

"The guards realized that Cao Zhongnan's identity was questionable and checked of their own accord."

"Liar. Why would the guards suddenly look into him!" The downside to using Cui Yue to relay information was that he could only repeat what other ghosts had said. If Bai Shaonan was lying to him, then he could only pass the lie along. Fu Zhaoyi tutted, then asked, "How has Bai Shaonan been treating you recently, in private?"

"Like normal."

Fu Zhaoyi nodded. He knew that Bai Shaonan was secretly plotting something, and on a scale large enough that he was dragging the whole underworld and his own reputation down with it. But was Cao Zhongnan part of Bai Shaonan's plan, or was that just a coincidence?

"When you're alone with Bai Shaonan, try to get him to divulge information. I don't care how you do it—seduce him or play dumb—but I

need to know what his objective is within the next two days, as well as how he found out about Cao Zhongnan," Fu Zhaoyi ordered.

"I understand."

"If you want to know my objective, wouldn't it be faster to just ask me? If you go the roundabout way through Cui Yue, how can you possibly get the answer within two days?" A lazy voice sounded from behind them. Fu Zhaoyi froze, a trace of fury sweeping through his eyes. This was a voice he could recognize anywhere.

"I thought you went to the Judge's court with your secretary. How come you're back so soon, Dean Bai?" Fu Zhaoyi turned halfway around. He now knew Bai Shaonan's objective—it was a trap laid to capture him, and though he had held back for a few days, he had finally succumbed to it.

"You were so happy to call me 'Bai Shaonan' just now, and so many times too, why switch back to Dean Bai so quickly? You're really breaking my heart here, Director Fu." Bai Shaonan's tone was unusually light, as though they were ghosts about to head out on a hike and a picnic together. He swept a glance over Cui Yue absentmindedly. "Since you're encouraging students to seduce their dean, I obviously needed to come back and set my pupil right. We have to keep educating the youth to keep them from deviating off the right path. Otherwise, they might end up like Cao Zhongnan."

Fu Zhaoyi's eyes narrowed upon hearing this name. If it wasn't for Qin Feng standing beside Bai Shaonan, looking ready to throw down if anyone dared come close, he would have charged up and grabbed Bai Shaonan's collar by now. As it was, he could only hover in place while demanding loudly, "Where is he!"

"Don't you know exactly where he is? After all, he's your son, Nan Jin," Bai Shaonan replied with a mocking smirk.

"So you went to the headquarters to investigate me. Wouldn't it be faster to just ask me? If you go the roundabout way, how can you possibly

get the answer within two days?" Fu Zhaoyi tried to maintain a calm exterior, throwing Bai Shaonan's own words back at him.

Fu Zhaoyi wasn't stupid. As soon as he heard Bai Shaonan mention the long-buried name Nan Jin, he recalled that Bai Shaonan had visited the headquarters with special permission, and put the clues together. Fu Zhaoyi knew that Bai Shaonan wasn't the only ghost who wanted to take him down, and that the dean was acting at the behest of the Judge. He swiftly glanced at his pants pocket, then quickly shifted his eyes back up to Bai Shaonan's vain face. His only chance of breaking free of the stalemate was to rely on his acting skills. Only by playing the role of a cornered beast could he make these two ghosts drop their guard, and give himself a chance at getting out of this.

Bai Shaonan didn't miss Fu Zhaoyi's fleeting glance. Despite the dean's falsely self-assured exterior, he knew that they were at a disadvantage. Just as they thought, Fu Zhaoyi had come quietly on his own, but he definitely carried the craft knife on him, in addition to a hostage—Cui Yue. The only way out of this was to rile up Fu Zhaoyi through talking until he lost all reason.

Qin Feng hovered quietly beside them. He looked left at Fu Zhaoyi, whose hand was bulging with veins, then right at Bai Shaonan, whose muscles were tense and stiff. They were both so obvious but also so on edge at the same time that they didn't notice what was minutely off about the other.

And as for Cui Yue… It was impossible to place expectations on him. His eyes were still hollow, as if he didn't see anything as he hovered obliviously behind Fu Zhaoyi. While he was in this suspended state, he wouldn't listen to Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan's words, but he'd follow every order from Fu Zhaoyi to a T.

"You must've forgotten everything from when you were Nan Jin, so you wouldn't be able to answer my questions anyway, right?" Bai Shaonan

initiated the attack as he laughed. “You couldn’t even recognize Cui Yue after all the times he appeared in front of you. And if news of Cao Zhongnan and Qin Feng getting together hadn’t reached your ears, you wouldn’t have found out that he was also one of your old creations.”

“Where the hell is Cao Zhongnan!” Fu Zhaoyi said angrily. If the Judge wanted to take him down, he had no choice but to give up the wealth he’d amassed since joining the Fu family. But that would be fine. Even if he went back to the way it was before, he still had ghosts at his beck and call.

“In order to join the Fu clan, you went so far as to abandon your own son. So why put up a sentimental facade now?” Bai Shaonan saw that the Fu Zhaoyi volcano was about to erupt, and to prevent him from ordering Cui Yue to hurt himself, he glanced at Qin Feng and asked, “Where is Cao B?”

“He’s in an Inferno,” Qin Feng answered solemnly. His detached air made it seem like he couldn’t even bother to lie.

“Impossible,” Fu Zhaoyi rebutted, gritting his teeth. There were ghostly guards everywhere at the Infernos. Cao Zhongnan would be discovered immediately if he’d snuck into one.

“He really is in an Inferno. That’s what he told me in the text message he sent,” said Qin Feng. Only, no one knew whether Cao Zhongnan was referring to the Inferno in hell, or in his mind.

“You’re still in contact with him? Get him to come here right now!” Fu Zhaoyi saw that Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng were both cool and collected from beginning to end, and finally couldn’t help but pull out what was in his pocket to hold it up to Cui Yue’s neck. “You two better get out of my way. I’m warning you this isn’t an ordinary craft knife. Since you found my original name, you know what it was that got me into the Fu clan. Cui Yue could die the exact same way that Bai Qinghe did!” he exclaimed.

In the end, Fu Zhaoyi was still going to use Cui Yue as a threat. At the same time that Bai Shaonan’s heart clenched, he also felt a pang of jealousy. He thought his little hotpot would only be willingly held by him, but now he

was witnessing his boyfriend pressed up against Fu Zhaoyi without protest. If this wasn't the wrong time and wrong place, Bai Shaonan would have given in to the urge to touch his own hair to see if it'd turned green.

"Qin Feng, tell Cao B to come here. Make sure he knows to stay away from the guards." Bai Shaonan sighed. Since Fu Zhaoyi had Cui Yue in front of him, he had to go along with the script and do whatever the other ghost wanted.

On the other hand, Fu Zhaoyi was the one who pushed Cao Zhongnan away in the beginning and was also the one demanding his appearance now. If Fu Zhaoyi wasn't a scum top, then he put all the ones who were to shame.

"All right." Qin Feng followed Bai Shaonan's lead. He took out his phone and pretended to notify Cao Zhongnan, when in reality he was only retrieving his recording device from his pocket.

Fu Zhaoyi had already admitted that he was the one who murdered Bai Qinghe. They had enough evidence to present to the Judge to prove the necessity of eliminating Fu Zhaoyi. Therefore, there was nothing left to do now but wait for the fighting to start.

"You two, out of the way. No, wait. Leave your human realm express access card behind; put it on the coffee table! If you don't want Cui Yue to die, then back off! Tell Cao Zhongnan to meet me at hell exit E19 by himself!" Fu Zhaoyi continued.

Bai Shaonan obediently took out his access card and tossed it onto the coffee table. He knew what Fu Zhaoyi was planning. If the Judge would no longer tolerate his presence, and Cao Zhongnan was on the run from the ghostly guards, then they could flee to the human realm together.

It was a nice dream, but he'd kicked Cao Zhongnan to the side all those years ago for a chance to enter the Fu clan just to call the ghost back now so they could suffer together. It never occurred to him that even kept dogs would bite their masters if they were toyed with.

Qin Feng didn't take out his access card and instead glanced up at Fu Zhaoyi. "Oh. He's here."

Fu Zhaoyi froze. He was half a beat late to realize that "he" referred to Cao Zhongnan. However, he scanned the entire reception room and failed to see any trace of another ghost. The hand that held the blade closed in on Cui Yue's neck as he cried out in anger, "Qin Feng, if you're bullshitting m—EUAHH!"

A ghostly figure suddenly appeared from the cabinets at the back, lunging at Fu Zhaoyi while he was speaking. The ghost was none other than the missing Cao Zhongnan.

"Lanlan, you—AH!"

Fu Zhaoyi's words turned into a miserable keening by the end. Cao Zhongnan never planned on letting the other ghost open his mouth. The craft knife in his hand cruelly pierced into Fu Zhaoyi's back. Cao Zhongnan's eyes burned with ferocious bloodlust, as well as an immeasurable joy.

The instant that Fu Zhaoyi was attacked, Bai Shaonan seized the chance to spring up and push away the hand around Cui Yue's neck, before pulling the ghostling close to his side. All this was done in one swift movement in the blink of an eye.

The situation took a one-eighty turn.

"Daddy, I'm back. I'm back from the 'inferno' where you'd thrown me away…" An expression of crazed obsession took over Cao Zhongnan's face. He eagerly took in Fu Zhaoyi's scent, even reaching out with his tongue to lick the other ghost's cheek. At the same time, his hand did not hesitate as he pushed the entire blade of the craft knife into Fu Zhaoyi's body, from the back through to the ghost's heart.

"Lanlan, so it's true that… ah… you like Qin…" Fu Zhaoyi struggled to get free but was held forcefully in place. He could only use his peripheral vision to look at the ghosts behind him. He never expected his son Nan Lan,

who was now Cao Zhongnan, would join forces with Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan to turn against him. Not only that, Cao Zhongnan never stopped twisting the blade in his hand, as though afraid that a single stab wouldn't be enough to kill Fu Zhaoyi.

"Of course not. You're the only one I ever loved from the beginning, Daddy." Cao Zhongnan gently planted a kiss on Fu Zhaoyi's lips, his gaze filled with nothing but the most passionate love. "I only made a deal with them. I was so miserable when you didn't want me anymore, Daddy. I've thought it through. We'll leave together. That way no one can force us apart. Doesn't that sound great, Daddy?"

"Lanlan… you—" Terror flashed in Fu Zhaoyi's eyes. From his perspective, he'd only neglected the other ghost for a few hundred years. But for Nan Lan, the span of lonely and hopeless days had long since turned him from an obedient dog into a broken doll.

Cao Zhongnan pulled Fu Zhaoyi's hand toward his own chest, using the craft knife in that hand to stab himself in the heart. He let out a dull grunt but his expression was passionate and alive. "Hahaha… Now we are the same… Hahaha. Are you happy, Daddy?"

There was no chance of survival after being stabbed. Fu Zhaoyi looked into Cao Zhongnan's crinkled eyes. The madness within them made him nauseous. As he was reminded of the fact that it was his own darling son who had brought all this about, he started bellowing out loud, "Nan Lan, you ungrateful sod! To think I used to treat you so well, and now you… Ungh…"

Cao Zhongnan didn't want to listen to Fu Zhaoyi cursing at him. Starting from their feet, their bodies had slowly started to disintegrate into the air, so there was no point in wasting time on these insignificant things. He leaned forward and met Fu Zhaoyi's lips with his own. After several hundred years of loneliness, he finally tasted the sweetness of reunion. Cao

Zhongnan closed his eyes. All that manipulating and strategizing was only for this one moment. Now, he wanted nothing else.

Now, there was no longer anything that could separate him and his beloved Daddy.

Neither Qin Feng nor Bai Shaonan spoke. Together, they watched as the two ghosts lost their opacity until they disappeared entirely before them.

Fu Zhaoyi's final expression was one of fierce struggle, while Cao Zhongnan's was of utter bliss. The two opposites mingled before they disappeared from this world, never to exist again.

Bai Shaonan bent down and picked up the two craft knives on the floor. The blades emitted intense ghostly energy. He sighed, carefully tucked the sharp objects away, and quietly called out to Qin Feng, who had not a trace of life in his eyes. "Do you need some time to yourself?"

Stiffly, Qin Feng shifted his gaze from the spot where Cao Zhongnan died over to Bai Shaonan. He moved his lips many times before finally managing a sound. "No need. This was my plan. I've mentally prepared for this."

That day, when Bai Shaonan went to Bai Qinghe's house to dig up dirt, Qin Feng had stayed on campus and carefully thought everything through. Then, he called over Cao Zhongnan, who assumed Qin Feng was feeling sexually unsatisfied and wanted a booty call. He even changed into a sexy pair of underwear. To his surprise, what awaited him wasn't intense physical activity.

"Are you after Fu Zhaoyi's life?" These were the first words out of Qin Feng's mouth.

Cao Zhongnan paused. When he snapped back to his senses, he was about to start his act, but meeting Qin Feng's cold and murderous gaze, he decided to drop any pretense of confusion and come clean. He also dropped the lovey-dovey look he always used for Qin Feng as well as the sunny and

cheerful mask he perpetually wore, responding instead with a numb blankness, "When did you find out?"

Qin Feng was not surprised when Cao Zhongnan revealed his true character. "You came to the school with a false identity, intentionally tried to get close to Cui Yue and me, and provided hints on multiple occasions. It's hard not to notice," he said evenly.

"All those clues, and you're only looking into me now?" Cao Zhongnan smirked, his voice mocking.

Qin Feng didn't answer. After all, Cao Zhongnan was fucking right.

"Never mind. You didn't ask me here to tell me about this, did you?" Cao Zhongnan reached out a finger and attempted to lift Qin Feng's chin but was coldly brushed aside.

"I can give you Fu Zhaoyi's life, provided that you tell me everything."

"Aren't you at all worried that I'll refuse?" Cao Zhongnan gave him a crooked little smile, as though Qin Feng had said something funny.

"You can refuse, or you can make up a lie, or even tell me half-truths." Qin Feng gave Cao Zhongnan a look. On the bargaining table, no ghost was his equal. Besides, he had enough leverage that he could surely make Cao Zhongnan bow his head. "Don't worry. I'll make sure that you won't see with your own eyes how Fu Zhaoyi dies. At that point, you'll probably just hear fragmented rumors from the ghostly guards."

"You—" Cao Zhongnan glowered in anger at Qin Feng. But quickly, he seemed to have remembered something, and his face flashed back to its original malice. "Isn't the Great Qin Feng afraid of what will happen to a-Yue if I give out a command?"

Something clicked in Qin Feng's mind, and he swiftly connected the dots of speculation in his mind. On the surface, he still looked as though none of it affected him at all. "Bai Shaonan isn't here. What good is it saying that to me?"

Following a round of back-and-forth negotiations, Cao Zhongnan hadn't been able to win anything for himself and was forced to accept the conditions Qin Feng offered. Only after he told the whole story, and Qin Feng and Bai Shaonan verified it, would he get the right to personally take Fu Zhaoyi's life.

Long before Bai Qinghe made his name as a crazy scientist, any STEM ghost devoted to research would refer to themselves with that title. Some of them would even take on like-minded disciples to conduct their research together. It was then that Cao Zhongnan, who was still a ghostling at the time, started following Nan Jin.

Cao Zhongnan's surname had always been Cao, but after Nan Jin went after him, he naturally changed his family name along with his first name. He didn't remember when, but he gradually became utterly infatuated with Nan Jin. At the same time, he knew better than anyone Nan Jin's determination to enter the Fu clan. Because of this, he suggested they take on the roles of father and son, attempting to use the connection of kin unrelated by blood, as well as lovers, to tie them together.

However, having changed his name to Fu Zhaoyi, Nan Jin still ended up kicking him to the side. A hundred years later, after seeing reports of Fu Zhaoyi's intimacy with female ghosts, Cao Zhongnan finally broke down. That was when the thought of perishing together with his beloved took root.

He was not capable of getting close to Fu Zhaoyi on his own. Cao Zhongnan started working on getting close to Bai Shaonan first. However, with the guard dog Qin Feng there, he had no choice but to change his target to Bai Qinghe. After successfully seducing the doctor, he accidentally found out about Bai Shaonan's secret. A plan slowly took shape in his mind. He convinced Bai Qinghe that taking care of illness and injuries was a great opportunity to bond, and furthermore, picked up the stray body parts left behind by Bai Shaonan on his missions, using them to activate Cui Yue.

Since the reawakened Cui Yue originated from Bai Shaonan, they were naturally attracted to each other. Once Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng realized that something was wrong, their investigation would eventually lead them to Fu Zhaoyi. The Judge's court wouldn't leave the investigation of homebrew artificial life in the ghostly guards' hands. No doubt, Bai Shaonan would be assigned to the criminal case. As long as Cao Zhongnan closely followed the situation with Cui Yue's help, he would surely get a chance to execute his plan.

"Then what's the deal with your enrollment?" Qin Feng scoffed as he listened.

"Daddy discovered that I'd gotten together with Bai Qinghe. He demanded angrily to know what's going on. I lied and said I wanted to come study here, so Daddy arranged it for me." A trace of glee flashed across Cao Zhongnan's eyes. That was also how he discovered that Fu Zhaoyi hated the idea of him with another ghost. It was why he used the Bai/Cui ship as an opportunity to seduce Qin Feng. This way, he could personally "guide" Qin Feng, and at the same time, he wanted to see whether Fu Zhaoyi would be able to keep from coming to see him.

However, he waited for a long time, and still Fu Zhaoyi didn't show up. Conversely, he saw Fu Zhaoyi urging his mole in the university to get close to Cui Yue, so he gave them a helpful push, using the power of suggestion to order Cui Yue to go up to the human realm with him. At the same time, he gave Cui Yue the seduction command so Bai Shaonan would realize that something was wrong.

Qin Feng didn't immediately relay all this to Bai Shaonan. Instead, only when Bai Shaonan found the name "Nan Jin" on his own, which confirmed that Cao Zhongnan hadn't been lying, did Qin Feng finally tell Bai Shaonan everything. At the same time, he proposed the idea of using the ghostly guards to draw Fu Zhaoyi out.

Having listened to the whole story, Bai Shaonan wasn't upset at Qin Feng for keeping secrets but rather helped round out details of the plan. He was somewhat hesitant about putting Cui Yue in danger, but under Qin Feng's cold and watchful eyes, he eventually gave his agreement. After all, only bait as enticing as Cao Zhongnan and Cui Yue would be capable of drawing Fu Zhaoyi into their trap.

Once their plan was finalized, Qin Feng told Cao Zhongnan to pack up everything in his dorm and find somewhere to hide. Meanwhile, Bai Shaonan notified the ghostly guards to come arrest the ghost who would most certainly not be there. Once news of the incident spread, Cao Zhongnan was secretly shuffled to the dean's office beside the reception room and waited for Fu Zhaoyi to arrive.

After that, everything went according to their plan. Fu Zhaoyi took the bait, and at last, disappeared into the ether with Cao Zhongnan.

Bai Shaonan glanced at Cui Yue beside him, who'd been offline the whole time, and gave him a karate chop at the back of the neck to make him pass out completely. "By the time the little hotpot wakes up, there'll be another battle to be fought."

"Yes." Qin Feng nodded, then quietly said, "Since the two of them are gone, you can now tell him everything."

A bitter smile appeared on Bai Shaonan's face. "With three such unsavory stories, I'm afraid he won't be able to digest it all."

In the beginning, they thought that Fu Zhaoyi was the son, but the truth turned out to be the opposite. Fu Zhaoyi was the daddy who appeared in Cui Yue's dreams, while Cao Zhongnan was the son.

Cao Zhongnan's plan had never been the most well thought out, but coincidentally, he'd made the key decision to bring Cui Yue out.

Cui Yue's existence triggered Bai Qinghe, though Bai Shaonan wasn't sure why. Clearly, he ended up choosing violence, attempting assassinations under the name of "Lovingly He." Fu Zhaoyi had his sights locked on Bai

Qinghe because of Cao Zhongnan's connection, so this obviously did not escape his notice. Therefore, when Bai Qinghe sent out his first warning letter, he followed suit and sent out a similar one, except his target was not Cui Yue, but the other directors on the board who challenged him.

After, when Bai Shaonan analyzed what had happened, he thought if they paid closer attention in the beginning, they'd have immediately noticed the obvious difference in modus operandi between the attacks on Cui Yue and the ones on the Fu ghosts. The latter was obviously meticulously planned, even borrowing techniques from Li Xizhi's research to ensure an instant kill, whereas the former was much more last minute—the dead professor at the hotel wasn't properly controlled and the slapdash Taoist cultivator was allowed to go on a rampage, hunting Cui Yue with no guidance. The imperfect operations left much room for Cui Yue to escape.

But whether it was Bai Shaonan, Qin Feng, or the ghostly guards, they were all misled by the letters. Their assumption of a single culprit allowed Fu Zhaoyi to get away with murder multiple times, finally culminating in a chance to clean up his own trail by wiping out Li Xizhi while pinning all the blame on Bai Qinghe.

Bai Shaonan had asked Cao Zhongnan why he believed that getting close to Qin Feng would help him achieve his goal of killing Fu Zhaoyi. At the time, Cao Zhongnan responded with only a grin, his face warped with zeal.

"I'd only expected a seventy percent chance of success, but as soon as Fu Wanli died, I knew my time had come. Back then, Daddy only submitted the blueprints. But did you know, Dean Bai, that those two craft knives were supposed to be tokens of our promise to each other. We each had one, but I never thought to use it before. But since he started using it, why should I have to keep mine stowed away?"

Bai Shaonan suspected that certain ghosts in the Fu clan had probably guessed the culprit was Fu Zhaoyi, but they chose to stay silent. That was all

right though, since the Judge would probably beat the silence out of them. Of course, none of that was relevant to him anymore.

When Cui Yue woke from his standby state, he was bombarded by the true events from the moment he opened his eyes. By the time Bai Shaonan finished talking and took a sip of tea, Cui Yue still felt like he hadn't completely woken up from his dream.

Bai Shaonan knew Cui Yue couldn't possibly process all this information at once, so he offered helpfully, "Are there any parts you don't understand? Just go ahead and ask."

"Does that mean your affection for me is only because I'm an extension of you?" Cui Yue quietly said as he quickly glanced at Bai Shaonan before lowering his eyes.

Forced to stay by Bai Shaonan's side for fear of "breaking down and doing something stupid," Qin Feng rolled his eyes. Certainly, it was very Cui Yue of him. Bai Shaonan had wasted all this breath explaining the situation, and in the end, all Cui Yue wanted to know was whether his boyfriend really liked him or if he just had a sentimental attachment to his old body parts.

Bai Shaonan was quiet for a second. "If you're willing to learn yoga properly, then I promise, I'll love you just the same even if you're an Infernal worm."

Cui Yue widened his eyes. He was about to blurt out the classic and mandatory question between lovers of "Am I more important to you or is yoga?" when a new inquiry popped into his mind. He set aside his original discontentment and asked another question. "You said just now that learning yoga is a tool to understand the separation of body and mind?"

"That's right. You don't have much time. The Judge's court will act soon." Bai Shaonan nodded.

Cui Yue put a hand out to stop Bai Shaonan from pulling out the yoga mat. “Since I didn’t have to learn before I successfully attached myself to ghostly objects in the past, maybe I can learn the separation techniques directly, without having to go through yoga?”

Bai Shaonan blinked. That was a possibility he hadn’t considered.

In the Hell Year 9163, four hundred years after Fu Zhaoyi was charged with phantacide and killed himself for fear of punishment, a whole new host of ghosts arrived in the underworld. Some moved on into reincarnation, while others stayed following their death. The sensational case of centuries past was no longer at the forefront of any ghost’s mind.

Certain new ghosts weren’t even aware of what had transpired four hundred years ago. Take Wang Qianyi, for example. She was a befuddled new ghost who had come fresh off her seventh day, after making her visit home as was custom. That day, she wandered aimlessly in the human realm, unable to find the path to the underworld. Fortunately, a female ghostly guard happened to pass by to guide her down.

“Thank you.” Wang Qianyi was very grateful. If the guard hadn’t called out to her, she would still be lost above ground.

“No need to thank me, I was just on my way back too.” The guard turned and gave her a warm smile that was at the same time striking. Wang Qianyi stared, forgetting herself. The guard was clearly used to other ghosts occasionally being stunned in her presence, and continued, “Have you decided where you want to go?”

Wang Qianyi returned to her senses and flushed with embarrassment when she realized she’d been staring dumbly at another woman. “Go… go where?”

The guard smiled. “As in choose to stay in the underworld, or go directly into reincarnation.”

"I haven't decided yet. Perhaps I'll stay here for a little while?" Wang Qianyi said quietly after a moment of thought.

"If you wander around aimlessly in the underworld, you'll get lots of ghostly guards coming to convince you to go into reincarnation. Have you considered going to school?" the guard continued, not surprised by Wang Qianyi's answer.

"School?"

"That's right. The University of the Underworld Northern Hell Campus is accepting new enrollments. You can check it out." The guard winked at Wang Qianyi. "Especially the Professional Malevolent Spirits and Creative Terrorizing Program; I know the chair of the department. He's not only a genius but is also very easy to get along with."

For some reason, the name of the program evoked a pleasant emotion within Wang Qianyi. She nodded earnestly. "Okay, I'll give it some thought."

"Yep, just think about it. I can also be your reference." The ghostly guard let out a whistle, and an eagle swooped down to land gently on her shoulder. "This is my husband. Together we're the head of the ghostly guards. My name is Lü Lin. If you need anything at all, just look for a guard and tell them my name, and you'll be able to find me."

Wang Qianyi was stunned. She didn't think her guide would turn out to be such an important figure, or rather, an important ghostly guard?

Lü Lin gave her a little smile before turning to leave. Her phone rang just then, and she picked up without a second thought.

"Hello, Lady Raptor, this is Dean Bai's secretary, Qin Feng." A cool voice sounded on the other end. It was none other than Qin Feng, the janitor of all Bai Shaonan's messes.

"Oh, yes, Secretary Qin, what is it?" Lü Lin thought for a moment. She hadn't had any official business with Northern Hell Campus recently. If Qin Feng was calling her, it had to be about their personal plans.

"We need to cancel the breakfast plan for tomorrow morning. I apologize on their behalf." Ever since Cui Yue had become the head of the department, Qin Feng was forced to take care of all matters related to him. Even though the devotee naturally didn't dare order the cult leader around, Qin Feng was now effectively not only Bai Shaonan's secretary, but Cui Yue's as well.

"Did something urgent come up?" Lü Lin asked out of nosy curiosity as she gently smoothed her hand over the eagle beside her.

"He and Bai Shaonan are indulging in their carnal desires." Qin Feng gritted his teeth.

Four hundred years ago, Cui Yue didn't need the help of yoga to successfully switch to a new body and, soon after, his inherited abilities gradually manifested. He even graduated at the top of the PIGS, earning himself the title of "genius" from the larger public. Only Qin Feng knew that this so-called genius would often be fooled by Bai Shaonan—in other words, Cui Yue would often roll into bed believing that an application had been approved only for the Judge's court to bombard Qin Feng with calls about the cardiograms of the two ghosts day in and day out.

At last, 230 years ago, Cui Yue abandoned all modesty and devoted himself to a life of shameless pleasure. Regardless of whether their applications were approved, they'd roll around in the sheets whenever they wanted to. The Judge's court also learned to stop calling Qin Feng at the slightest fluctuation on the cardiograms, and at most, would temporarily turn the monitor off.

Bai Shaonan grinned when he found out. Previously, he and Cui Yue would carry out their activities on a regular schedule before bed. Now, they could indulge at any time, like at this very moment. Upon returning to campus, Qin Feng had been welcomed by noises from the dean's office that

were far from welcome to his ears, prompting him to call Lü Lin to cancel their meeting.

Lü Lin couldn't help but chuckle. "One moment of bliss is worth a thousand gold. I understand."

In the dean's office, the two ghosts currently "indulging in carnal pleasure" were pressed tightly together. Cui Yue was already drenched, his pupils unfocused, but his arms were still wrapped around Bai Shaonan's neck. Since a kiss was keeping him from speaking, he expressed his love through body language.

Bai Shaonan once again leaned into Cui Yue's lips. Hundreds of years in each other's company had long proven that his affection for Cui Yue was not just attachment for an extension of himself. He caressed a scar on Cui Yue's body, an injury sustained from a joint mission. Cui Yue had claimed it was a memento from when they fought together, and he couldn't bear to get rid of it.

Even after becoming a professor, his little hotpot was as adorable as ever.

"Shaonan… Don't stop…"

Bai Shaonan's movement had slowed while he was deep in thought. Cui Yue figured he could take the opportunity to catch his breath, but still filled by Bai Shaonan, he started to feel unsatisfied again. He had no choice but to beg to not be led on like this.

A smile appeared in Bai Shaonan's eyes and he kissed the little hotpot in his arms. He quickly granted his lover's request as sweet moans and loving words filled the room once more.

Thrill and excitement were never prerequisites for love. Calm and uneventful days like these were enough. They'd been in love for four hundred years and would continue like this in all the days to come. *This* was what people call happiness.

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Epilogue

"Replacement?"

A giant question mark took shape in Cui Yue's mind as he looked over at the horde of students who'd suddenly charged up to his office. His lectures were the most popular in the entire PIGS program, but he was also known to be the strictest professor. Usually when students saw him outside of class, they'd want to turn and run the other direction.

But now, they had floated into his office with a request he couldn't understand.

"Yes, Professor Cui. The play opens in half an hour, but the student who's supposed to be the female lead went up to the human realm this morning and was unfortunately forced to ascend by a monk. There's no way we can find a replacement at the last minute!" the student at the front of the group said anxiously, her tone hurried but her gaze determined. "The costume was so complicated that it took the designer two months to complete before they burned it down to us. We can't possibly alter it now. After giving it some thought, we realized that only you have a figure similar to that girl, so… Please, Professor Cui!"

Cui Yue looked back at the girl speaking to him with a conflicted look in his eyes. She might only be in her second year at the university, but she was secretly regarded as a peak performer who was sure to graduate at the top of her class in two years. Cui Yue, on the other hand, hadn't singled her out for her grades, but rather her name.

Her name was Wang Qianyi.

Cui Yue knew of one female ghost with the same name. Because of this, he made sure to look into her but realized that she didn't remember anything, only referring to him as Professor Cui whenever they spoke. He was sure, however, that she was the girl who'd sacrificed herself to save Cao Zhongnan and him.

For personal and professional reasons, Cui Yue couldn't bring himself to deny the request of a ghost who'd shown him such compassion.

Besides, the play wasn't just a trivial little performance. U of U NHC held a campus festival every four years, during which every major would devote themselves to putting on an entertaining performance. It was always a memorable college experience for all students involved.

Cui Yue didn't want to leave the students with a disappointing memory, but… the female lead? They wanted *him*, a male ghost, to play the *female* lead?

"What kind of play are you doing?"

"It's *Romeo and Juliet*." Cui Yue's question gave Wang Qianyi hope. "There's a wig, and the costume will completely hide your body. As long as we put heavy makeup on you, no ghost will know that it's you!"

"And the lines…"

"It's okay. We'll prepare prompt posters for the lines; you only need to read along!"

"All right then. I'll do it. But I can't make any promises about how it turns out."

"Thank you, Professor Cui. Oh, right, that student was also going to represent us in the Midnight Lovers Scavenger Hunt. Would you…"

Cui Yue arched his brow. Scavenger hunts weren't limited by costumes. Were they not able to find any replacements?

"Everyone in PIGS is a pathetic bachelor. The one and only couple had just been torn apart," Wang Qianyi puffed out her chest and said proudly in

response.

Cui Yue had no words. Was this something to be proud of? Had they really become obsessed with being a pig?

Never mind. Cui Yue waved his hand. Since Wang Qianyi asked, it would be cruel to refuse. Only, it wasn't something he could agree to on his own. "Dean Bai is in his office today. If he says yes, then—"

"Thank you, Professor Cui, we'll go see Dean Bai right away!"

Wang Qianyi left him with this deafening line before dragging the other students off to the dean's office. Watching the pigs fly off in a flurry the way they came, Cui Yue belatedly remembered that *Romeo and Juliet* was a love story.

Would Bai Shaonan feel a little cuckolded once he found out?

Cui Yue thought back to a recent incident when he took a female student up to the human realm for a makeup exam, and upon return, was "dealt with" in such a way that he spent three whole days in bed as punishment for the "infidelity." Cui Yue could feel his butt hurting already.

Half an hour later...

Cui Yue was wearing an elaborate dress, a wavy blonde wig on his head, and a good helping of powder on his face. It was indeed hard to see who he was from offstage. However, as soon as he opened his mouth, waves of cheers sounded in the audience from those who recognized him.

Even though he'd been pushed up onstage at the last minute, Cui Yue recited his lines proficiently. After all, as an esteemed malevolent spirit, acting was one of the important skills one had to master.

After the scene where Juliet first met Romeo at the ball, Cui Yue floated up to the newly constructed balcony. He had just finished saying the classic line, "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?" to the backdrop of a starry night sky, when a certain familiar male voice answered him.

"Dear Juliet, I will give my all for you. Will you elope with me?"

Elated screams issued from the audience. Meanwhile, Cui Yue glared at the ghost who'd suddenly appeared onstage. Did he think that by combing his hair back and donning a tuxedo, Cui Yue wouldn't realize the dude was Bai Shaonan?

This party crasher obviously wasn't the Romeo from the first act. How could Wang Qianyi and the others let…

Cui Yue glanced toward the animated crew nearby, who held up a card that read "Dean Bai is Romeo."

Hearing the cheers from the audience, Cui Yue was disappointed to find that none of the ghosts here thought replacing the male lead in the middle of a play was a big deal. He drew a deep breath and was about to continue the show with Bai Shaonan as Romeo, when another familiar male voice suddenly chimed in.

"Dear Juliet. O, that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek!"

Even livelier screams rang out from the audience than when Bai Shaonan first appeared. Cui Yue tried desperately to control his face so he wouldn't make an expression unbefitting that of Juliet. On the other hand, Bai Shaonan immediately glared at the newcomer, his eyes filled with displeasure.

What the hell are you doing up here, Qin Feng?

Your students invited me. You're the one who suddenly crashed the party.

Qin Feng looked back at Bai Shaonan calmly. He didn't think there was anything wrong with his entrance. Besides, back in the office, a certain dean had snuck off to the bathroom with the excuse of going number two only to fiddle with his phone. So, Wang Qianyi had redirected her target from Bai Shaonan to Qin Feng. Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue might be the widely recognized couple, but all these years later, Qin/Cui was still a very popular ship.

Only when he came back from the toilet did Bai Shaonan find out that Qin Feng had accepted the invitation. Of course, he couldn't allow Qin Feng and Cui Yue to act lovey-dovey together—or even worse, Cui Yue and a student. To that end, he made his debut on the stage in the middle of the play to defend his position as the "main" love interest.

Meanwhile, the ever-thoughtful secretary, Qin Feng, who regarded taking his boss down a peg as his primary job description, also followed him onto the stage. The play had already gone off the rails anyway with Bai Shaonan's appearance; one more ghost wouldn't hurt.

"You impostor—I am the real Romeo!"

Bai Shaonan hadn't looked at the script before he got up onstage. He simply said whatever he thought of, as the free spirit he was.

"What nonsense are you spouting"—Qin Feng quickly countered Bai Shaonan's improvised lines—"*I* am the real Romeo."

Cui Yue looked between Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng helplessly. Um, should he perhaps remind them that neither of them was Romeo?

"There can only be one Romeo here. The only way to solve this is with —a duel!" The party crasher Bai Shaonan seemed to have forgotten his purpose, turning the love story into a duel. "Whichever ghost wins will be Romeo."

"Sure," Qin Feng answered right away. "How should we do this?"

Cui Yue was speechless. Was there any ghost who still remembered his presence?

"We have three ghosts here. Me, you, and Cui Yue." Bai Shaonan stroked his chin, and as though hearing the cry from Cui Yue's heart, lifted his head and asked, "How do you think the three of us should do this?"

Cui Yue was flabbergasted. He had to participate too?

He was Juliet, not Romeo. Why did he have to participate in the "who's the real Romeo?" contest?

Cui Yue's brain whirred to a stop as Qin Feng thoughtfully offered, "If we're short a fourth player, why not just get another actor up here?"

Bai Shaonan had completely forgotten the reason he was here. Upon hearing the words "short a fourth," he answered instinctively, "Sure, let's get another student up here. We'll decide on a champion with a game of mahjong!"

Were there people who played mahjong in Romeo's time?

Cui Yue rolled his eyes. Judge Yanluo in hell, could someone please come and end this once and for all.

Unfortunately, Cui Yue's thoughts couldn't be telepathed into the minds of other ghosts. Wang Qianyi looked at the audience, which was getting more excited by the minute, and gestured for all the PIGS to follow Bai Shaonan's lead.

Soon, a mahjong table and a full set of mahjong tiles were freshly burned down from above ground and carried onto the stage. A male student wearing a horse-head mask also accompanied the game.

Considering the student's entire face was obscured by the horse-head mask, it was a wonder how the ghost inside was able to see. Bai Shaonan noticed the student was a little nervous and offered some reassurance. "What's your name?"

The student had been forced up here at the last minute and had no idea what was going on. At the sound of someone asking his name, he answered dumbly, "M-My name is Ruan Zhihuan, from Underworld Management… They didn't have enough ghosts on hand so I came to help… as Romeo's horse…"

Bai Shaonan patted Ruan Zhihuan's shoulder. "Don't be nervous Mr. Ruan. Come sit down and play mahjong with us. Whoever wins will be Romeo."

Qin Feng pulled out a chair and said to Cui Yue, "Sit down, Juliet, we're playing mahjong."

Since his idol was calling his name, Cui Yue immediately obliged and sat. In an unexpected turn of events, the four ghosts actually started playing mahjong onstage. Meanwhile, the audience watched on with bated breath, as though this was always a part of *Romeo and Juliet*.

After a round of fierce combat, Romeo's horse overpowered Bai Shaonan and Qin Feng, becoming the real Romeo.

Everyone fell silent.

Seeking to end the charade, Cui Yue forcibly changed tracks to reinstate the original plot, whereby Juliet and the horse-head Romeo eloped together. This, however, also resulted in the ending being rewritten from a tragedy to a happily ever after. Naturally, the two fraudulent Romeos also became a ship to be enjoyed by the audience, to sail off happily ever after.

And so, their rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* became one of the high points of the campus festival.

The reason it was only "one of" the high points was because the actual climax of the campus festival was usually the Midnight Lovers Scavenger Hunt. Each program would send out a couple to look for a list of things around campus before entering a room sealed with ghost talismans, not to be let out until they finished the designated task.

The couple who completed the task first would not only be the champion but also receive strings of marriage courtesy of the Judge's court.

Cui Yue and Bai Shaonan had no need for the strings of marriage, nor would they scrabble to compete for first place against their own students. The PIGS had invited them only to satisfy their own voyeuristic desires. Regardless, as soon as they appeared at the event, the entirety of U of U NHC exploded with cheers, the enthusiasm even more rampant than it was for the play.

"Look, little hotpot, at how beloved your boyfriend is by the students." Bai Shaonan stroked his chin. It was a rare occasion when Qin Feng wasn't around to keep his narcissism in check.

Cui Yue *humph*ed and didn't say a word. He hadn't yet gotten over the previous spectacle with the play. How dare Bai Shaonan act as if nothing had happened!

"Are you angry, little hotpot?"

"No."

"You're angry."

"I told you I'm not."

Cui Yue, not angry in the slightest, puffed up his cheeks. Internally, he made plans to speak with Qin Feng the Great as soon as the campus festival was over and lock Bai Shaonan in the dean's office for three days and three nights, only to be released once his work was done.

Knowing Bai Shaonan, the dean must have accrued a mountain of unfinished work anyways.

A foreboding feeling rose within Bai Shaonan as he looked at Cui Yue, who was clearly angry. Unfortunately, the scavenger hunt was about to start, and he very well couldn't cite "my little hotpot is angry" as an excuse to withdraw from the contest. The only thing to do now was to hurry and finish the hunt, then smooth things over after they got home.

"Dean Bai, Professor Cui, this is the card for your first task. There will be three in total. You have to find the object in the first task before I'll give you the next one."

A crew member floated over and deferentially handed an envelope to them. Cui Yue recognized him as one of the PIGS students.

"Can we start now?"

"Not yet. We have to wait for the bell…" Before the student finished speaking, an enormous boom that shook the eardrums of every ghost reverberated through the campus, announcing the start of the most exciting event of the festival.

Bai Shaonan quickly opened the envelope. The writing on the snow-white card inside did not ask for an object. Rather, it was a deliberate head-

scratcher.

Hanako of the Toilet.

Cui Yue knew that the objects involved in a scavenger hunt were usually unexpected, but he never thought it'd be such a challenge.

Where would they go in the University of the Underworld Northern Hell Campus to find a Hanako of the Toilet?

Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue exchanged a glance and saw matching bewilderment in each other's eyes. However, puzzled as they were, the others who'd also received their difficult tasks didn't stay put as they did, having already floated off to complete their assignments.

The student who handed them the envelope couldn't help but quietly remind them, "Dean Bai, Professor Cui, hurry up and look for her. The Hanako of the Toilet!"

Bai Shaonan snapped back to his senses and immediately pulled out his phone. He dialed a familiar number and ordered as soon as the line connected, "Qin Feng, get over here!"

Having received a command, Qin Feng swiftly appeared. Bai Shaonan waved the task card in his hand. "What are you?"

Qin Feng was quiet for a moment, but very quickly, he abided by Bai Shaonan's wish and announced in a hearty male voice, "I am Hanako of the Toilet."

Bai Shaonan nodded in satisfaction before turning to the gawking crew member. "We found Hanako of the Toilet."

It seemed "Hanako" was tall in stature with hair that was far from long and straight, and apparently she had undergone a gender change. But the crew member in charge of confirming the scavenged item was none other than a PIGS student, and the lost little piglets would believe anything their cult leader Qin Feng said without hesitation.

"Yes, Qin Feng the Great. Indeed, you are Hanako of the Toilet! Dean Bai and Professor Cui passed the first round!"

Cui Yue frowned, having witnessed the entire process. *Is this acceptable*??

Bai Shaonan didn't care if it was reasonable. His disregard for logic was apparent from the moment he summoned Qin Feng. Next, they opened the second envelope.

A Little Red Riding Hood who meows.

M-Meows?

After the initial shock wore off, Cui Yue quickly pulled out his phone with trembling hands. *Is Qin Feng about to meow*?

He *had* to get this on video!

Not only Cui Yue, the whole crowd of pigs who hung onto their great leader's every move all took out their phones and pointed them at Qin Feng. This was a major event in the history of their cult; it was necessary to record it in the highest resolution!

Bai Shaonan did not speak, though the ridicule in his eyes was clear as day.

"I am Little Red Riding Hood." Qin Feng swept a look at Bai Shaonan rejoicing at his misfortune, and spoke in a flat and emotionless voice, "Meow."

"AHHHH—"

"Ahhhh! Qin Feng the Great is meowing!! Huh? What's going… Did they… ascend? They ascended on the spot?"

A chorus of thrilled shrieks went up in the crowd. One of the PIGS students had been so elated that they ascended right then and there.

The corner of Bai Shaonan's eyes twitched when he heard the excitement from the crowd. It was nothing but a monotone statement from three blades of grass—was this necessary?!

Also! *Don't think I can't see your heart eyes, little hotpot*! *I'm going to become upset if you go on like this*!

"Thank you, Qin Feng the Great, for gracing us with your words!" Tears glistened in the crew member's eyes as he handed the third envelope directly to Qin Feng. And as for Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue? Qin Feng was the one who completed the tasks anyway, so why not skip over the two of them entirely?

Bai Shaonan was rendered speechless.

After this campus festival, he would surely rid the school of this cult once and for all. He would refuse to give in no matter how the little hotpot might fight him!

After shooting a confrontational look at Bai Shaonan, Qin Feng opened up the third envelope.

A sleeping beauty woken by a kiss.

Who would be the one to kiss Qin Feng?

The horde of pigs suddenly held their breaths and shut their mouths. They looked at one another, and though none of them dared make a sound, they were all more than willing to offer up their lips as sacrifice.

Even if Qin Feng the Great cut their lips off afterward, it would be worth it!

As a member of the cult, Cui Yue was, of course, just as willing to go through fire for their great leader. Unfortunately, Bai Shaonan was hovering right beside him. He knew that something as small as a kiss on someone else's hand would make his boyfriend combust into a mushroom cloud on the spot, before doing the same in his butt.

As a result, the devout follower Cui Yue hurriedly made eyes at his boyfriend, signaling, "I don't mind, go on and kiss the Great Qin Feng."

Bai Shaonan had no words. He truly wished his little hotpot would mind, just a little.

Cui Yue's glance was not lost on Qin Feng. He snickered as he turned to Bai Shaonan, the mockery in his eyes spelling out, *Maybe I'll put on a brave face and let you kiss me.*

Bai Shaonan told himself it wouldn't be appropriate to get into a fight with his secretary during a campus festival. He jerked Cui Yue into his arms, and before the little hotpot could cry out in surprise, pecked his soft cheek with the gentleness of a butterfly flutter.

"He's my sleeping beauty."

Bai Shaonan swept his gloating and recalcitrant gaze over every ghost present, successfully drawing screeches from the crowd at an even higher decibel than the ones directed at the meowing Qin Feng.

"AHHHH! Long live Dean Bai! I've now lived and died without regret, I'm ready for reincarnation! AHHH—"

"Professor Cui is blushing!! Ahhh! This is adorable!!!"

"Kiss him! Kiss him again!"

Cui Yue was so embarrassed that he refused to leave Bai Shaonan's arms. Meanwhile, Bai Shaonan shot Qin Feng a proud look, as though he was a peacock who'd successfully won over a mate.

You hear these screams?

In response, Qin Feng calmly reminded his boss, "One meow from me just now, and a student ascended on the spot."

Did that happen after you kissed Cui Yue? *No.*

Bai Shaonan glared at Qin Feng.

You wanna bet that if I made out with the little hotpot right now, the entire student body wouldn't collectively ascend?

"Cui Yue would never cooperate with that. Besides, if the students all disappeared at once, Northern Hell Campus would have to close down." Qin Feng turned away, expressionless. "If you have time for making out, it's better spent moving on to the next task, which still needs to be completed."

"What makes you the arbitrator here?" Bai Shaonan rolled his eyes. Hearing the prolonged screams, he knew that his sleeping beauty had passed the test.

"I supervised the talisman seals on the rooms and personally reviewed all the tasks inside," Qin Feng said coolly. "After all, a certain dean had forced all the responsibility onto me."

Bai Shaonan rubbed his nose. Intuition told him to not talk back, unless he wanted to bear the horrible consequences.

The three ghosts floated up to the designated room, at which point Qin Feng pulled out a pink envelope. "Open it once you're in the room. Only after completing the tasks inside will the seals be disabled."

"And?" Bai Shaonan arched his brow at the envelope still gripped in Qin Feng's hand.

"There's no surveillance in the room. No ghost will know what you do inside." Qin Feng noticed Bai Shaonan's expression, as though he'd caught a sniff of conspiracy, and chuckled. "Same with the tasks; I'm the only one who knows the details. The students don't know anything."

"Why so secretive?"

"Why don't you see for yourself."

Qin Feng was done being courteous. He kicked the two ghosts in and sealed the room with talismans, and the world was finally quiet.

A large bed sat in the middle of the room, along with a row of sex toys one wouldn't expect to see at a campus festival.

Not to mention… these were BDSM themed sex toys.

Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue exchanged a glance before fearfully opening the envelope together. Seeing the huge letters on the card that spelled out "BDSM," they suddenly felt they didn't know English.

Cui Yue's face instantly turned red. He knew *of* the campus festival but never paid attention to the details of its program. He never expected it to go this far; no wonder Qin Feng explicitly told them that there was no surveillance in the room.

"Good thing the other students don't know." Cui Yue might be embarrassed when it came to this task that had obviously been engineered

by a certain ghost, but he quickly accepted this reality.

"Little hotpot, this is clearly…"

"If it's been personally reviewed by Qin Feng, it has to be right. Hold on."

Having said that, Cui Yue floated up and grabbed a whip from the pile. He cracked it through the air with the added force of his ghostly weight. *Bang*! The large bed split in half.

W-Wait. Hold on. Bai Shaonan was bewildered. What was he doing?

Cui Yue looked at his masterpiece and nodded with satisfaction. "Ready, Shaonan?" He spoke in a voice that seemed to be angling for praise.

Respectfully, Bai Shaonan asked for an explanation, shifting his gaze from the bed back to Cui Yue's face, "Ready for what?"

Cui Yue gave Bai Shaonan a glare, as though protesting his lover's obliviousness before answering bashfully, "Ready to… you know, SM you…"

Are you sure this is BDSM, little hotpot, and not murder?

Have you somehow misunderstood BDSM?

Bai Shaonan hastily floated up to Cui Yue. He'd secretly been a little happy that his little hotpot was willing to try something different with him, but with a crack of that whip, all of his excitement had turned into horror, and all his frightened sperm headed back into their sac. He took Cui Yue's hand as a distraction, taking the chance to seize the weapon of destruction and toss it to the side. "This isn't BDSM, my little hotpot, this is mariticide," he said, disturbed.

"Qin Feng taught me this personally," Cui Yue protested, puffing up his cheeks in displeasure.

"What did he say to you?"

"Beat him hard, beat him with everything you got—that's the ultimate philosophy of SM!"

Bai Shaonan was upset beyond words.

That bastard Qin Feng. He thought it strange that his secretary was so cooperative during the scavenger hunt. Turned out, an ambush had been waiting here all along.

Bai Shaonan decided that as soon as they got out, he would suspend Qin Feng's salary for three months—or maybe just one… Hm. Perhaps two weeks would be enough?

Qin Feng's vengeance was on point. After all, trying to persuade a follower of the Qin Feng cult to disobey the words of their great leader was even more impossible than getting the entire Fu clan into reincarnation.

Therefore, Bai Shaonan knew that if he was to escape this fate, he couldn't defy Qin Feng's teachings and would instead have to distort their meaning.

"It's not a good idea to start off with the ultimate philosophy, little hotpot." In an attempt to beguile the very ghost who shared a bed with him, Bai Shaonan gave a charming smile that could sweep the entire underworld off their feet. "How about we start at the beginner level, okay?"

Though it had been hundreds of years, Cui Yue was just as helpless as he'd always been against Bai Shaonan's deliberate seduction. Take now, for example—a warm flush crept up his cheeks and he nodded without thinking.

Bai Shaonan finally laid his tensed-up nerves to rest. If Cui Yue insisted that Qin Feng's method was real BDSM, then the only way he could get out of this room would be in two halves.

The only bed had been split in two, but fortunately it was still large enough to use. Bai Shaonan carried Cui Yue onto the bed, and as soon as they touched the soft mattress, he leaned in impatiently for a kiss.

He wasn't stupid. It was important to hurry while he had the upper hand. If his little hotpot was dizzy from kisses, he wouldn't suddenly come around and insist on beating Bai Shaonan up.

Cui Yue endured Bai Shaonan's kisses. Their motions, which soon began to resemble the act of their bodies joining into one, were incredibly

erotic, yet effective at evoking his desire. Soon, his brain had turned to mush and all he could act on was instinct.

Bai Shaonan stripped their clothes away and the two ghosts tangled together in bed. Bai Shaonan's slightly cool touch brought a little clarity back to Cui Yue's mind. When he realized that Bai Shaonan was cocked and ready, his blush spread at once from his cheeks to his whole body, turning him into a real live hotpot shrimp.

"Ha… You're adorable."

Bai Shaonan couldn't help but chuckle. The total number of times they'd done the deed had long surpassed the number of years they'd been together, but every time, Cui Yue still acted as bashful as though it were their first. And it was this exact reaction that ignited the most uncontrollable desires within Bai Shaonan.

Screw professors, deans, and missions from the Judge. He wanted nothing more than to lock Cui Yue up at home, where they would spend all their time in bed with no regard for days and nights. Other than fulfilling Bai Shaonan's desires, Cui Yue would not be allowed to go anywhere else, forced to be covered from the inside out with Bai Shaonan's scent.

But, of course, those were merely fantasies. He couldn't bear to actually do this to his beloved little hotpot.

To distract himself from the dark animalistic urges within, he spread open Cui Yue's legs. His lover disliked it when he left love marks in conspicuous places, though Bai Shaonan didn't mind—he could simply change target to more private spots.

"Mm… don't laugh at me… Shaonan—you're biting me again!"

Cui Yue frowned. He was already a little displeased at the contrast between his own lust-addled brain compared to Bai Shaonan's still-lucid expression, but this vile ghost clearly wasn't about to get to the point. Not only was Bai Shaonan not going to prep him, but he dared to bite the inside of Cui Yue's thighs!

"This is me loving you, little hotpot." Bai Shaonan heard the shyness beneath Cui Yue's fuming. He lifted his head and exchanged a soothing kiss with him before saying, "Don't you see how loveable you are there? It's so soft and fair; every time I see it, I want to take a bite."

"You bite me there every time." Cui Yue glared at Bai Shaonan unhappily, though the moisture in his eyes had obscured his usual sternness. Now he was closer to a cat waving its paws—only effective at riling up his partner even more.

However, Cui Yue's next few words achieved the opposite effect.

"The pants I wear to the UV sessions are very short. If you keep biting like this, wouldn't other ghosts see the red spots?"

"What UV session?" Bai Shaonan had a bad feeling about this. What kind of newfangled cheating scheme was this? How had he never heard of it before?

"It's to tan my skin. You know how ghosts don't get a lot of sun." Cui Yue didn't notice Bai Shaonan's gradually darkening expression as he continued obliviously, "I'm too pale. So far, I've only gone once—uwahh—Shaonan… it hurts… Don't put it in so suddenly!"

"It better hurt." Bai Shaonan gave him a fake smile as he inserted three lubed-up fingers into the tight hole, recklessly spreading it wider. "Good for you, little hotpot—going to that kind of place behind my back?"

"What do you mean 'that kind of place'… mmng… ah… It's on campus…" Cui Yue didn't understand why Bai Shaonan was so angry. Hadn't he handed the flyer to Cui Yue in the first place?

Clearly, the hardworking Dean Bai had forgotten all about it.

After prepping Cui Yue just enough that he wouldn't be injured, Bai Shaonan mercilessly pulled out his fingers, replacing them with his swollen cock. As the warmth and tightness wrapped around him, he half closed his eyes from the pleasure. Meanwhile, on the receiving end, Cui Yue wasn't doing so well. Clutching weakly at the bedsheets, his quiet little moans were

so uncontrollable and pathetic that any ghost listening would take pity on him.

"Mnng… Shaonan—it hurts… ah. I… it hurts…"

"Hurts?" Bai Shaonan didn't give Cui Yue time to get used to him, going for the sensitive spot as soon as he entered. He reached up and smoothed out the wrinkles between Cui Yue's brows as he chuckled. "Do you hear how blissful you sound right now, little hotpot?"

"I'm… nngh… not bliss… ful…"

"If not, then why are you panting so much?" Bai Shaonan pumped his hips hard a few times, happily receiving a round of high-pitched whines in response. "Look how perky you are at the front, little hotpot. It might hurt, but it also feels good, right?"

"No… no—ahh! Mmn… ah…"

Bai Shaonan was rougher than usual. Cui Yue continued crying out in pain, but at the same time, he felt a pleasure he'd never experienced before. It was frantic and aggressive, but the pain intertwined with pleasure made him feel hopeless and exhilarated at the same time.

Cui Yue was shy enough during regular intercourse, it was impossible for him to admit that pain could also be pleasurable.

But Bai Shaonan wouldn't allow him to escape.

"No? But aren't you about to come? And much sooner than all the times before, little hotpot."

Similar to his incursion on Cui Yue's backside, Bai Shaonan's hand as he stroked Cui Yue's front was just as aggressive. Even so, precum still burst forth eagerly from Cui Yue's cock, an expression of his elation.

"I'm… not—ah! Sh-Shaonan, what are you… mnn…?"

"Nothing. You said yourself that you don't want to come just yet, so I went ahead and blocked it for you. The finger he used to obstruct the urethra opening roamed around the sensitive tip, successfully forcing Cui

Yue into a deeper well of desire. His pale little hips quivered violently, moving along with Bai Shaonan's rhythm, helping him bury even deeper.

The way his little hotpot looked right now was unbelievably hot. Bai Shaonan wanted to eat him up.

"Mnng, let go… Shaonan… L-Let go…"

"I can't. You'll come as soon as I let go. That goes against what you just said."

Bai Shaonan leaned in and wrapped his lips around Cui Yue's earlobe, gently nibbling at it, tasting it. This caused Cui Yue to contract, and Bai Shaonan couldn't help gasping out loud.

"Little hotpot…" he moaned against Cui Yue's neck.

"Ah… Shaonan, let go…"

"All right, since you look so pitiful… Do you want to come?"

Dazed and lost in desire, Cui Yue suddenly came back to his senses at this and immediately replied, "Yes—I want to come."

"Beg me."

"Sh-Shaonan?" Cui Yue ventured.

"I said you have to beg me, little hotpot." Bai Shaonan continued tasting Cui Yue's slightly swollen lips. Like a large cat that had caught its prey, he suddenly turned playful, wanting to give his partner a final scrap of mercy to see if he could escape his clutches. "Say something good, and I'll let go if I'm satisfied."

"Say…" Cui Yue's eyes were wide. He didn't know what the hell Bai Shaonan was on about. He wiggled his hips surreptitiously, attempting to lure Bai Shaonan into releasing him. But not only did Bai Shaonan not fall for it, he stared back at Cui Yue with a dangerous look in his eyes.

"Looks like our little hotpot doesn't want to come, hm? I guess we should continue, since after all, this mix of pain and pleasure is your favorite, right?"

"No, that's not—" Cui Yue gasped. He was about to protest, but Bai Shaonan had initiated a new round of attack—first drawing out before burying himself all the way in with one motion. The feeling of euphoria tinged with pain shot straight up from Cui Yue's lower body to his brain. Tingles all over his body temporarily blanked out his consciousness, but still he couldn't help looking forward to more.

"What do you mean 'no'? The mini little hotpot looks even more excited than before."

"I'm… not… Unng…" Having been mercilessly exposed, Cui Yue finally broke down. Tearfully, he cried out, "Shaonan… Shaonan… I… don't like this…"

Seeing that Cui Yue was actually about to burst out crying, Bai Shaonan finally restored his intentionally withheld tenderness. He stopped, planted a kiss on the corner of Cui Yue's eyes, before saying, "I thought you wanted the beginner version. What, a little verbal domination and you can't take it anymore?"

"I don't want this… I don't like it…" Cui Yue wrapped his arms helplessly around Bai Shaonan's neck as he whined. "I don't wanna do it anymore… We don't have to leave this room…"

"Hah, all right, you don't have to be so scared." Bai Shaonan stroked Cui Yue's back, seizing the chance to leave a few more love marks on his collarbone. "We'll do it like usual, okay?"

Cui Yue nodded vehemently.

"Then promise me that you won't go to any more of those tanning sessions," Bai Shaonan immediately stated his demand. Using deliberately rough sex to force Cui Yue into agreement was something a caring lover like him would never do—*ahem*—probably.

"But I'm too pale…" Cui Yue pursed his lips unhappily. "You're the one who said that."

"I was wrong. Little hotpot, you're adorable the way you are, soft and fair." Bai Shaonan had completely forgotten when he'd said this. After reflecting on it, he was still delighted that a casual line thrown about carelessly had been taken so seriously by his partner. But when he imagined Cui Yue stripping down almost naked out there somewhere, he refused to tolerate it.

"You're the one who said it."

"You're right, it was all me."

"Then I won't go anymore. I don't have the time to go anyway…" Cui Yue mumbled quietly before pausing. His expression turned reticent again. "Then Shaonan, when will you… move…"

"On it."

Bai Shaonan resumed their kiss, and the interrupted rhythm began again. This time, he was as considerate and gentle as all the times before, adjusting each thrust according to Cui Yue's reaction. As the overwhelming pain receded, what followed was an equally overwhelming tenderness.

"Ah… ha… Sh-Shaonan…" Cui Yue gasped as he struggled for breath.

"I'm here."

The entangled passion continued over several sessions. The uninhibited lovemaking successfully ridded the memories of the play from Cui Yue's mind. By the time they were finally willing to separate from each other, the scavenger hunt was long over.

The students were not ignorant about sexual matters. Since Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue were taking their sweet time, they had surely figured out what was happening inside.

Thinking of this, Cui Yue wrapped the duvet around himself and swore that he would stay in the room forever.

In a rare moment of intelligence, Bai Shaonan reassured him that they were better off staying for a little longer since they'd already been there for

so long. They could leave at noon, he said, by which time all the students would be long gone and naturally wouldn't notice.

Cui Yue thought it made sense. Besides, Bai Shaonan had drained most of his energy. After a while, he closed his eyes and dozed off.

This was the moment Bai Shaonan was waiting for.

Of course, Bai Shaonan would leave whenever he liked, regardless of what time it was. If students were crowding about outside, then all the better. He wanted them to see just how in love their dean and Professor Cui were. Cui Yue belonged only to him, and no ghost was allowed to think otherwise!

Bai Shaonan packed Cui Yue up in the duvet. He made sure that his gentle motions did not wake his lover, even taking care to cover up his face as well as his entire body. Only then was he satisfied and carried the ghost out of the room.

It was the morning of the next day, and the scavenger hunt was long over. However, the crowd of students was still standing guard nearby, waiting to witness the moment the two ghosts emerged from the room.

They never expected Dean Bai and Professor Cui to go straight at it inside the room. They really… wished they could turn into one of the pieces of furniture inside.

When Bai Shaonan appeared, the ghosts outside almost let out a collective gasp—or rather, they almost did, but Bai Shaonan lifted a finger gesturing for them to be quiet. As everyone noticed the giant duvet-covered burrito in his arms, they hugged each other in glee while holding in silent screams.

They were fed! They were stuffed from the honeyed sweetness of a real ship!

Ah! The PDA of a student-teacher romance was so unbelievably sweet!

They had come to the right school after all! Everything led up to this very moment!

Bai Shaonan didn't understand why the students were tearfully hugging each other instead of staring at them with bedazzled eyes. However, leaving the two of them alone was already a big help. He nodded at Qin Feng, who'd been standing by this whole time, indicating for his secretary to proceed with the cleanup, before carrying his little hotpot off to bed.

Once in the dean's office, Bai Shaonan set Cui Yue on the bed before gently pulling the duvet away. Without the covers to keep him warm, Cui Yue rolled a few times before coming to rest in a familiar embrace.

Bai Shaonan's heart turned to mush at Cui Yue's unconscious gesture. He stared at those eyes, their corners still tinged pink, and as though hypnotized, leaned in and kissed Cui Yue's temple.

Bai Shaonan was the only ghost who had the privilege of seeing his little hotpot like this.

And he would never tire of the sight.

News of their romantic tryst spread throughout campus, making Cui Yue so embarrassed that he nearly quit his job. As his grudges old and new built upon each other—the spectacle of the play and the lie of staying in the room until noon—he sought for his partner to account for them all. In the end, Bai Shaonan spent a whole month locked in the dean's office before he was finally allowed to go home.

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Author's Note

Thank you everyone for purchasing this novel, and thank you to all who read up to this point.

When I first envisioned *University of the Underworld*, I wanted simply to write about an invincible bossy CEO-type character helplessly at the mercy of all characters other than his significant other. Even though the CEO character eventually and inexplicably turned into a dean, I still found that the writing juice flowed especially well whenever I got to parts where Qin Feng had Bai Shaonan so tightly in his grasp that the latter dared not speak out in protest. Haha. It's possibly because I imagined myself in Qin Feng's shoes, and had too much fun abusing the male lead.

When the thought of writing something first occurred to me, I was just bored and looking for something to do. I brought it up with my friends, to which they replied, "Go ahead and write," so I wrote one chapter and asked my friend to read it. I still haven't received her feedback even now. I was convinced it was so bad that she couldn't find the words to tell me to dump it all and start over.

But still I continued writing. And eventually, what started out as something I did to kill the time slowly became a part of my life. The process of putting words on the page was both bitter and sweet. Every time I ran crying to my friends, whining that I didn't want to write anymore, that I wanted to have fun or read novels, they would tell me to "ditch it then."

Ahem. These were very supportive friends indeed.

They were writing too, but they often abandoned their ongoing stories or procrastinated on updates. I thought perhaps I could set an example to encourage them to keep going, so I clenched my teeth and crawled back to writing… Unfortunately, setting an example with oneself is not something that works in practice when it comes to writing. Though if it wasn't for their "encouragement," I really might not have persisted.

Just like that, I kept writing, and writing. Which has brought me to this point.

I am very thankful to Myrics and Uei-Shiang for giving me this opportunity. I never thought that there would come a day when I too could publish a book.

Perseverance doesn't necessarily lead to success, but it does bring us closer to our goals.

This is dedicated to everyone who is still pressing on and to you all who continue to support me along the way.

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About the Author

Socially awkward Aries; loves giving into her indulgences. As for the pen name, it was taken casually from the title of the Jin Dynasty poem *Homeward Bound* by Tao Yuanming.

When she has writer's block, Ziloi doesn't force herself to keep writing. Instead, she'll drop it and run, with the hope that inspiration will come if she drags it on for long enough. And if it doesn't… Well, she'll still bow down to fate and crawl back to organize her words, or even rewrite them.

A fan of mystery plots that involve warning letters or threats, Ziloi was also itching to write a story set in a college campus. However, all sorts of problems cropped up once plotting began, so with the idea that mysteries must include the death of at least one character, she thought, Why not make all the characters dead? That's how *University of the Underworld* was born, and how Bai Shaonan and Cui Yue went from living humans to undead ghosts (>ω<)

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